



Bangladesh **1971**

Dreadful Experiences





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(Translation of the Bengali book ১৯৭১ : ভয়াবহ অভিজ্ঞতা)

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Cover design by Ashok Karmakar

First Published in February 2017

ISBN 984-70124-0254-2

English translation of the
Bengali book

Unishsho Ekattor : Bhayabaho Obhiggota

Edited and compiled by

Rashid Haider

Published by

Shahitya Prakash

on December, 1989

Dedicated to*the victims of 1971's atrocities and the continuous
struggle for justice by the survivors***Contents**

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Editors' Note

The translation effort of *Bangladesh 1971: Dreadful Experiences* started in the summer of 2011 as we felt that accounts of such personal experiences of Bangladesh's Liberation War was missing in languages other than Bangla. We wanted to give faces to the millions of people killed and tortured by presenting stories of their sufferings to an international audience. In the spring of 2013, the translation project took an interesting turn. We decided to harness the strength of social media by asking for volunteers to complete the task in an urgent basis. But, the crowdsourcing model appeared to be so loosely bound, so chaotic—how would we manage the whole effort? None of us were native English speakers, most of us were not even 'semi-professional' writers—how could we maintain the essence of the original narrative?

The volunteers came from all walks of life, with varying educational and professional backgrounds much like the diversity present in the profile of the original narrators. In addition to that, they were residing all over the globe. The one common ground was that each held a deep respect and dedication to uphold the truth of our nation's bloody birth to the world, despite not witnessing it. In a way, the project was this generation's journey to re-live through the moments. The diversity among the narrators and translators reflected in their writing styles and required strict reviewing and editing. Each translated article was first peer reviewed by some other translators. Then the three editors went through each of them, occasionally tossing the original translation completely and creating a new one. We then had the articles reviewed by native English speakers who commented about the writing style, grammatical correctness, and factual completeness (some terminology had to be explained for an international audience). On average, each article was reviewed at least nine times after the original translator submitted his/her effort. Finally, the Chief Editor marked the articles clear for publication.

The authors of the original articles possessed different literary skills—some were prolific writers, some merely a common person (housewife describing her dreadful experience of losing everything). Therefore, each experience was told differently. We wanted to retain the original writing styles, e.g., an army personnel's style of using short factual sentences or a prolific writer's style of using allegories to describe her experience. In a way, the crowdsourcing model helped us, since no two articles had the same writing style. During the editing phase, we took great care to keep the original tone and the writing style of the narratives. To help international readers, two new parts have been added to the original book to provide context. One is a glossary of important terms. The second addition is a set of illustrated maps of Bangladesh, the Dhaka city, and the Dhaka University area. We believe, they will aid a reader in following the narratives as authors describe when and where an event took place. We are very grateful to Geologist Muhammad Shahadat ossain for generating the maps.

We want to thank the Liberation War Museum, Dhaka, Bangladesh; Centre for Bangladesh Genocide Research and MMR Jalal; Sachalayatan.com; Online Writers' Community; and playwright, director Nazrul Islam who had introduced us to the publisher. Our sincerest gratitude to publisher Mofidul Hoque and original Editor Rashid Haider for giving us the permission to proceed with this effort and their encouragement and co-operation throughout the process. Finally, there are many friends and acquaintances—too many to name individually—who have helped us with information and references.

We expect that the English version will be useful not only for an international reader who is curious to know about the events of 1971, but also for the second and third generation of young Bangladeshis living abroad who want to know more of their roots.

When we read the narratives the first time or when we were reviewing them, sometimes we were aghast by the brutality, sometimes we were tearful feeling the pain; but we were always encouraged by the resolve and the strength shown by our countrymen. We owe a great debt to the martyrs and the freedom fighters. It is an honor and privilege to be a part of an endeavor that brings their tales to the whole world.

January, 2017	Munawar Hafiz Salwa Mostafa Ashfaqur Rahman Farhana Binte Sufi
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Editor's Note- *First Bangla edition, 1989*

How horrific were the nine months of our Liberation War?

In the beginning of 1972, a video taken during the war was aired on American television. It was a video of the killings at Jagannath Hall, a dormitory of Dhaka University on 26 March, 1971. It was recorded secretly by Dr. Nurul Ula (*read the first story in this book*). The video had a disclaimer: "Children and the faint-hearted should not watch this."

The next day after it was aired, the newspapers reported that many people, even the brave ones, either fainted or fell ill after watching the video featuring the deliberate and brutal massacre.

Why would the video evoke such strong reaction from people who are used to see killing, torture, and rape every day in movies? The answer is easy—in the movies, killing or death is enacted; not so in reality.

In this collection, we have tried to put the accounts of some of the eyewitnesses of our Liberation War in writing. We have read about the terrible tortures by the Nazis during the Second World War; and also seen it in many movies. But we never imagined that we would have to suffer similarly. The writings of the witnesses describe the brutal and ingenious ways the Pakistani Army and their allies—the members of [Razakart](#), [Al-Badr](#), [Peace Committee](#), etc.—tortured the people of then East Pakistan who were hungry for their independence. There are so many other stories beyond this collection, some perhaps more horrific. We know our limits: we cannot possibly portray the atrocities that transpired in just one book. However, this is our humble effort to capture some of the horror stories.

2.

These days, many define the Liberation War as 'trouble'-time or too quickly-achieved', and many consciously distort the historical facts. This is definitely a matter for concern. Who does not know that from March till December of 1971, Bangladesh was like a prison? Everyone still alive there was facing death at every moment, with terrible uncertainty about the future. It cannot be denied that those inside the confinement of this country were the worst sufferers. This collection is their eye-witness accounts.

When I asked somebody to write his/her narrative, I had a special request: the story had to be witnessed by the person himself or herself, not something heard from someone else. Experiences heard from others are prone to distortion; that in turn distorts history. Since all the articles published here specifically mention places and dates, the reader can verify the authenticity with little effort.

The narrations are organized chronologically, from March till December. We did not give any extra value to the writer's age, qualification, or social position.

Some authors have mentioned the pre-war history and noncooperation movement in their writings. Although the topics are related, I edited these parts out to jump right into the event. I beg pardon for taking advantage of editor's freedom on those articles.

I am deeply grateful to those who have helped by writing and providing links. Many authors have directed me towards other potential authors. I have to mention a few names: Professor Anisuzzaman, Asad Chowdhury, Asaduzzaman Noor, Gazi Salahuddin, Firoz Mohammad, Shamsul Arefin, Somrojit Pal, Lt. Col. Muniruzzaman, Motahar Ahmed, Rabiul Hussain, Kazi Shamsuzzoha, Meera Singh, Akhtaruzzaman Ilias, Mofabeja Khan, Heera Alam, Mahbulul Huq, Mohammad Sirajuddin, Muhammad Mujadded, Jatin Sarkar, Zahid Haider, Shueb Shahriar, and Shikhan Touhid. A special thanks to writer Subrata Barua for translating an article written in English to Bangla.

Publisher and friend Mofidul Hoque didn't spare a moment to agree to publish the book when I contacted him through an expatriate friend. The staff at the publishing house has helped me all the way. Artist Qayyum Chowdhury was enthusiastic from the beginning. My humble respect to all these people.

I shall consider my effort a success if this collection helps somewhat to save the true history of the Liberation War.

<i>Victory Day</i>	Rashid Haider
<i>16 December, 1989</i>	7, East Rampura Dhaka -1219

Note from the Publisher

When the anthology of dreadful experiences of 1971 was planned and compiled by Rashid Haider to be published in December, 1989, we had no idea how one book can become an important documentation about the genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes in Bangladesh perpetrated by the Pakistan Army and their local collaborators. That was also a dark period in our history when values of the Liberation War was trampled and history was denied and distorted. The book became a part of the memorialization process the people made through writings, and joined the galaxy of other significant memoirs of 1971. The importance of the book started to unfold gradually. In a major development, Professor Rounaq Jahan of Columbia University contacted us for permission to use few of the accounts in the forthcoming anthology *Genocides in the Twentieth Century* " edited by Professor Samuel Totten. She translated the articles and put them in the book where stories of Bangladesh genocide found place alongside other major genocides of the twentieth century. That book, published in 1995, was an important recognition of Bangladesh genocide in a scholarly publication which started to be quoted in many other subsequent academic works.

As we look back to the path traversed since then by the nation and also by the book and its contributors, we can notice many important developments. [Jahanara Imam](#) †, a contributor, led the struggle for the trial of war criminals in 1991 and became the idol of new generation. The People's Tribunal formed by her got massive support of the freedom loving people as well as members of the post-war generation. That event influenced the course of history and after many ups and downs in 2008, the nation gave strong electoral verdict for the trial of perpetrators of genocide. Consequently, International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh (ICT-BD) was established and verdict is now being delivered following the due process of law. Many of the events mentioned in the book became part of the court-proceedings and few of the authors also testified in the tribunal. Most importantly, the book can now be read from the perspective of global and national understanding of

genocide. Elements of international crimes highlighted in the eye-witness accounts can now be studied in a new light. The articles are presented chronologically which showed the atrocities were committed uninterrupted through-out the nine months. The place of occurrences were spread all over the land. Thus, the articles highlighted the ‘widespread and systematic attack against civilian population’, the very definition of crimes against humanity as recognized by the international community.

The horrendous crimes of massacre in Dhaka University at the outset and the intellectual killing at the end of the war, showed the hatred the perpetrators had for the academics and teachers of Bengal. Such killing of intellectuals and members of social leadership betray the plan of the Pakistani junta to destroy the nation. Alongside the Bengali nationalists, the Hindus as a religious group was specially targeted. There were also cases of forced conversion as mentioned in one of the narratives. A very moving episode described the fate of unfortunate girls recovered from the Pakistani camp which is one example of widespread violence against women. ICT-BD in its verdict termed the sexual violence of 1971 as genocidal rape. All these showed the genocidal intent of the perpetrators to destroy a group either wholly or partially, be it national or religious.

Re-reading the book in the changed scenario will provide a new insight to the readers. That can be especially true for the English language readers world-wide. At the time of its first publication, there was no ICTR, ICTY; the International Criminal Court could not even be dreamt of. Now the global justice system has re-asserted itself and Bangladesh tribunal has delivered justice for such crimes. Unfortunately, there still lacks understanding about the historical reality of Bangladesh genocide and books in English are required to promote the truth. It is very heartening that a group of young Bangladeshis came forward to accomplish this task and translated the book on their own initiative to place before the global readership. This shows the power of memory becoming inter-generational. The fifty eye-witness accounts of dreadful violence will definitely contribute in the struggle of the people to promote justice and truth. We express our gratitude to the young translators in their collective effort to uphold the cause of humanity and hope that the English version will earn wide readership that the book deserves.

<i>Dhaka</i>	Mofidul Hoque
<i>January, 2017</i>	

Bangladesh 1971
Dreadful Experiences

Videos of Genocide

Dr. Nurul Ula

*Educator, Professor, Electrical Engineering, King Saud University,
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*

I went to bed early on the night of [March 25](#) †. I had read in the newspapers earlier that day that an agreement between [Bangabandhu](#) † and [Yahya Khan](#) † would come soon. So we were rather perplexed when we woke up in the middle of the night at the sound of a huge explosion.

After the explosion, there was a pause; then the horrific sound of gunshots and explosions of mortar shells began. We took shelter in the passage between the bedrooms and the bathrooms to save ourselves from stray bullets. I could not resist my curiosity and crawled near the window, trying to see what was happening outside.

Back then, I lived on Fuller Road. My apartment was on the fourth floor in a complex built for the professors of the Engineering University*. It was across the old Assembly Hall. From my window, I could see the field in front of [Jagannath Hall](#) †, a dormitory for students of [Dhaka University](#) †.

That night was pitch black. However, I could see that the dorm and its surrounding roads were occupied by the military. A little later, some of the dorm rooms caught fire. I could see soldiers searching every room with flashlights. I didn't consider it safe to continue watching from my window; so I returned to the corridor. We stayed up all night listening to gunshots that never stopped.

As dawn broke, I crawled back to the window and looked out again. I could not see a soul anywhere; only countless brickbats on the road and two large white sheets spread across the field. I was a bit relieved: perhaps, there weren't that many casualties. But what happened next, I never dreamt I would see in my life; and I hope no one has to ever witness such horrific scenes.

It was morning by then. From the west end of the field, where the main dormitory of Jagannath Hall is located, appeared twenty or so Pakistani soldiers and with them two injured students. The soldiers were carrying the two students. For a moment, I thought that the soldiers would perhaps take the injured students to the hospital. They carried the students near the white sheets. Then they removed the two sheets... and, to my horror, I realized that the sheets were covering many other dead bodies.

The injured students sat facing east; the dead bodies remained behind them. Two of the soldiers moved a little more to the east and then faced them and aimed their rifles. For a second, I saw the two students begging for their lives with outstretched hands—and then the guns fired.

None of the soldiers shot more than two or three bullets. The two soldiers came near the fallen bodies—perhaps already dead—and shot the last bullets from a close distance to ensure that they really were dead. They had light firearms, so the gunshots were not very loud.

This was the first time in my life that I had witnessed murder; and that too the murder of the injured in cold blood. An army vehicle moved through the streets announcing the curfew and warned everyone not to look through the windows. I had to think of our safety before I could have felt the mental shock of the event completely.

But I didn't stop looking, because I was quite sure that if the windows were closed and the lights were off, nothing indoors could be visible from the outside. I was only hoping that the worst was over; that I would not have to see any more. However, it was only the beginning.

Sometime later, some soldiers brought along several more injured people from the Western dorms. Just like before, they were brought near the dead bodies and the soldiers aimed their weapons at them. Then the firing started, somewhat aimlessly. Some of the captives were standing, some were sitting. The soldiers opened fire on them from close proximity. There was a puff of dust around the victims as the bullets passed through their bodies and hit the ground behind them. The pile of dead bodies on the field kept rising.

Later, the foreign TV journalists asked me what my mental condition was back then—what gave me the idea of filming this massacre. Actually the idea was not quite mine. After watching the cold-blooded murders of injured, unarmed people twice, I realized there would be more; there would be a genocide today. And I wished naively that we were armed as well. It was then that my cousin Noseem said, “[Bhajan†](#), we should record this.”

I remembered that I had a video camera with a video cassette recorder (VCR) at home. It was a Japanese first generation portable VCR that was very heavy, probably the first of its kind in the country. I set up the camera as soon as possible, with a black paper set in front of it that had a hole through which I had inserted the lens, and I placed it facing the window pane. Only the camera lens showed through the curtains. I also slightly parted the window and placed a tiny microphone outside the window. As I was setting everything up, two more batches of people were shot dead. In the video*, I recorded the last three batches of the killing. The last one was the most horrific.

In the video, the captives were being brought along from the eastern side of the field. Some were wearing [lungi†](#) and t-shirts, some didn't wear a shirt at all. I guess they were sleeping when they were captured. They were brought near the pile of deadbodies and were also shot dead.

Then, suddenly the field was clear. Already, the pile of dead bodies was quite high. I thought perhaps the massacre was over. But soon I saw about forty armed soldiers lining up along the northern side of the field. They were tall and fair, most probably because they were [Punjabi†](#) soldiers. These soldiers were not the ones from before; they did not participate in the killing. Those who had fired were shorter and darker. About ten of these non-Punjabi soldiers appeared from the eastern side of the field with approximately twenty-five hostages. I thought maybe they were brought to take away the corpses.

But as soon as they came near the bodies lying on the ground, the soldiers accompanying them moved a little towards the east and targeted them with their rifles. Everything was dead silent for a few moments. I saw one of the people, someone with a beard, kneel down and beg for mercy. The guns roared. Bullets showered on the people as their bodies fell, and the dust rose all around as the bullets pierced through the bodies and hit the ground.

When the firing stopped, I saw that only the bearded person was still alive. It seemed as if no one had aimed directly at him. The man started begging again. A soldier kicked his chest trying to make him lie down. But the man kept firmly kneeling. Then they shot him down. His lifeless body finally lay with those of the others.

The Punjabi soldiers who were standing along the northern side now joined the others. Some of those that took part in the shooting moved the bodies around to check. When they found somebody alive, they ensured death with a few final shots.

After a while, all the soldiers left. It was quiet and empty all around, other than the countless dead bodies in the Jagannath Hall field. A van drove by with a round rotating antenna on its roof. I realized it was checking for microwave detectors or any signals in case anyone was broadcasting anything. I thought my video camera might transmit some signals, so I quickly turned the recording off. I hit rewind and checked if the footage was captured properly. Then I removed the tapes and dismantled the setup.

It couldn't have been more than 10 a.m. by then. We feared that there could be an attack on us anytime and decided it wasn't safe for us to remain there much longer. I fled to Old Dhaka with my family and relatives, despite the curfew. I saw a great bulldozer digging just before we left, that was around one o'clock. I cannot say what happened next. But I figured it was digging up the grave to bury the bodies. And my guess was confirmed after independence.

* *Engineering University* Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) is the nation's top engineering school.

* Link to parts of the video footage shot by Dr. Ula shown on NBC News report from 1/7/1972 – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEidHJKTu00>

I Was at Jagannath Hall

Kaliranjan Sheel

Political Activist, Bangladesh Communist Party, Dhaka

‘Am I really alive! My friends, my roommates, people whom I knew even yesterday are dead now. We had picked up the dead bodies in the morning, dragged them into one place. Now they are dead... all of them... but I am alive. How is that possible?’ For days these thoughts haunted me. I pinched myself to check if I was really alive. What had happened on that dreadful dark night of [March 25†](#), 1971 in Dhaka city—[Dhaka University†](#) and [Jagannath Hall†](#) in particular—makes me shiver till this day. It is not possible for me to write a proper description of the crazy sport of murder and torture the barbaric monsters of the Pak Army unleashed upon the unarmed students and respected teachers of Dhaka University. Words can never describe such brutality. But, still, I have to try.

The political environment was quite agitated since the beginning of February. The celebrations on [February 21†](#) that year revealed our strong desire to become an independent nation. We took an oath, iron fisted, for our mother tongue and for our independence.

The situation escalated after the National Assembly was postponed on the March 1, 1971. The people were robbed of the right to form the government. Then [Bangabandhu†](#) declared on [March 7†](#), “This time our struggle is for freedom, our struggle is for independence.” The country erupted in a month long wave of demonstrations, protests, and processions. The [Students' Union†](#) (BSU) played a crucial role in all this. Using dummy rifles, they started training for a ‘probable’ war on the Dhaka University gymnasium grounds. Students were trained on how to fight against the enemy and how to survive under attack. I was also with a training group. Within a few days, the training was complete for the first batch. With three groups, one of which comprised of female students, we marched on to the streets. We started a chain reaction: those who were trained became trainers themselves for the students coming from other parts of Dhaka. Along with the rifle training, the student leaders also explained why we should be fighting, what we were fighting for, and what our goal was.

After March 7, students started to leave the dormitories of Dhaka University. On the morning of March 25, a Thursday, we had a regular

training session at the gymnasium ground followed by a motivational talk at the auditorium that went past noon. In the afternoon, we brought out a procession from the [Shaheed Minar†](#). After the meeting, we all gathered at Balai's canteen at the Science Annex building. During that meeting, Nurul Islam, president of the Students' Union came and informed us, "The situation isn't very well." He told us to be careful and to gather at the Shaheed Minar the next day, [March 26†](#), at 6:30 in the morning.

I used to stay in the South House of Jagannath Hall, room number 235. I was a little late returning to the dormitory that night; I fell asleep right after dinner. I woke up at a loud sound near my head. As soon as I was fully aware, I heard a rat-tat-tat-tat sound everywhere, interrupted only by a skysplitting boom-boom sound at regular intervals. The old building was trembling under the sound of gunfire and shells from all around—it was as if the whole building would collapse at any moment. I had never heard such sounds of explosion or shooting. I panicked a bit being in such a situation for the first time in my life. I wasn't sure of what to do. And then, I thought of Sushil.

Sushil was the sub-editor of our Hall cabinet. He used to stay on the third floor, in the room next to the south side stairs. I started to crawl towards his room. I later heard that he had gone into the main building as soon as the firing started and the Pak Army killed him there. After I came out of my room, the sounds grew louder. Along with the terrifying sounds, you could see the explosions lighting up the sky. I crawled behind the low walls of the veranda towards the south stairs and climbed up the stairs to the third floor. As I came close to Sushil's room, I could see a faint light inside, but the door was locked from the outside. Somebody heard my footstep and called out in a very low voice, "Who is it?" When I responded, they told me to climb to the roof of the building. A few students had already gathered there to take cover. But I didn't stay with them. Selfishly, I decided to stay by myself. So I started crawling from there towards the north corner of the building. I left my flip-flops on the way, so that I would not make any sound. I was ducking very low behind the wall so I could avoid the direct path of the bullets. When I reached close to the bathroom cum toilet in the north corner, I saw an electric heater laying there on the way. It was connected to a wall-outlet of a room. It might have not been turned on. But I didn't take any chance and carefully avoided it to go into the toilet.

Its location was such that I could look to the north-east and the west clearly. All the buildings, fields and streets—everything was dark. But I could still see that the military were searching out the students from each room with flashlights and then taking them to the Shaheed Minar to shoot them. Their death screams and the sounds of the bullets shattered the skies. If anyone tried to run, he was shot right there. Looking back, these scenes may seem like a nightmare, but that was exactly what happened there. Sometimes the Pak Army would fire heavy cannons at the buildings. Some rooms were set on fire. At one point, I noticed that the tin-shed houses in front of the Assembly were burning. Some of the rooms in the North House were on fire as well. Somehow they were setting the second and third floor rooms on fire by shooting something through the windows.

Every now and then, I heard some strange sounds and saw balloon-like fireballs coming down from the sky. Some of them were green, some red. By the light of those fireballs, everything could be seen as clear as daylight. In that light, I saw that there were hundreds of soldiers on the field of the North House. They were shooting at the Hall with heavy machine guns and heavy cannons. On some of the roads, I saw several army Jeeps scouting with their headlights turned off. Maybe they were checking whether everything was going according to plan, making sure the destruction and the killing went on smoothly.

Suddenly I saw forty or fifty military coming from the direction of Salimullah Hall* towards the South House and breaking into the dining hall. They turned on the lights in the dining room and started shooting randomly. I could also hear the sound of things breaking. Some people screamed with their last breath and died. At one point they came out with the doorman of South House, Priyanath [da†](#), with a machine gun pointed at him. They forced him to open the main gate of the Hall. As they entered the premises, I could not see them anymore. All I could hear were gun shots, things getting shattered, and the death screams of the students. When I saw them entering the building, I slid out through the window of the toilet and lied down on the window-sill of the third floor. There were a few Sal trees next to it. A branch of the Sal tree was hanging very close to the cornice. I thought for a moment that I would climb the tree. Then I decided not to. I dragged myself on my back towards the corner of the cornice and lied there, afraid to even breathe. I heard them climb up the stairs, from the first to the second to the third floor. I could feel them coming. I heard a few gunshots very close to where I was. Someone right on the opposite side of the wall next to my head was moaning. All I was thinking was that they would see me any moment and drag me out. But they did not see me. They went down the stairs and called out to somebody named 'Farid'. A soldier responded and ran down. I waited a long time on the cornice. When I felt there were no more soldiers nearby, I again dragged myself to the window I had slid out through. On one hand there was the risk of rolling out and falling from the cornice, on the other hand there was the military. At last, very cautiously, I returned to the toilet. From there, I could see the road on the west, Salimullah Hall, the North House, and parts of the east. I watched the havoc wreaked by the military and counted the minutes before they would come and shoot me to death.

At one point, I saw a fire burning in Salimullah Hall. Sometimes the northern and western sky would become red. They were probably setting fire somewhere over there. Houses were burning. Shops too, along with people inside. The rat-tat-tat and boom-boom sounds I heard right after I woke up hadn't stopped for a second in all this time. In between the gunfire, I heard the screams of the innocent many times. The massacre by the Pak Army continued through the whole night.

Eventually dawn broke. I heard the Fajr [Azaan†](#)—the first one followed by a few others from different directions. The call for prayer never sounded so mournful. At the sound of the Azaan, the shooting stopped. But only for a few seconds. Around dawn, curfew was nounced over the megaphone. I thought maybe the unnecessary killings will stop soon. But as sunlight filled the earth, I saw the military dragging out those who had been hiding at night and shooting them to death. I lowered my head and stayed in the latrine, hoping that they would not see me. Occasionally, I peeked to see what was going on.

The day rolled on. There were fewer soldiers roaming around the North House and adjoining roads. I heard voices in a balcony near me. When I was sure that the voices belonged to students, I stepped out of the toilet door. To my peril, I came face to face with a few students, and several soldiers standing at the top of the stairs with machine guns. The students were carrying a corpse downstairs and the soldiers were monitoring them. It was the body of the fellow they killed last night on the other side of the wall where I was lying down. It was none other than our beloved guard, a loyal old friend, Priyanath da. They had forced him to show every nook and corner of the building and then they killed him. This time there was no escape for me. The students hinted at me to help with the corpse. We carried his body down from the third floor and then through the south side gate to the north side of the Bank (the location where Sudhir's canteen is situated now had a branch of the National Bank of Pakistan back then). A few other bodies from different rooms were piled up there. After a while, the Pakistani soldiers ordered us to sit down.

I was there with a few other students, some gardeners, launderers, sweepers, and with the two sons of our guard Gayanath: Shankar and Dulal. We were sitting around the pile of bodies. The sweepers spoke in their own language and asked the Pak military to let them go. They

argued that they were not [Bangalis†](#) and were therefore innocent. I don't know if the soldiers bought it or not, but they were separated from us. One soldier guided them through the east side of the laundry, by the tennis court to the field of the North House. We figured that they would be set free.

Then they ordered us to move the corpses. We were split into groups of two. As each pair carried a body, two soldiers would guard them from the front and rear. We took the corpses past the east side gate using the road in front of the Assembly building. There was a huge tree next to the south side of the gate where we started piling up the bodies. Once we were done moving all the dead bodies we were allowed to rest under the tree. One of the soldiers even shared cigarettes with us and started smoking. Most of us were either sitting or lying down under the tree. I was leaning on the root of the tree. Right around then, Shankar's elder brother grasped one soldier's feet and begged him to spare his life and to let him go. This annoyed the soldier and he stomped and kicked him eight to ten times to get him off his leg. The other soldiers started to curse at us. Some of the language they used—I cannot even repeat it here. I couldn't understand all they were saying, but the gist seemed to be, "You scoundrels! You are gonna free Bangladesh!??? Come on, let's hear you shout out, '[Joy Bangla†](#)'. We will see how [Sheikh Mujib†](#) frees Bangladesh." And all this was laced with unspeakable profanities. Around this time a motorcade came around from the [Racecourse Field†](#) and stopped near us. One of the soldiers guarding us walked to the front Jeep. The people in the Jeep instructed the soldier about something.

Then we were split into a few groups. Each group was taken in a different direction. The group that I was with was taken to the building where [Dr. Guhathakurta†](#) used to stay. When we approached the stairs, we saw a lot of dead bodies. It was apparent that they had been brought to the stairs before they were shot dead. I remember one dead body with a young face, wearing white [panjabī†](#) -pajama and a prayer cap. We were made to walk past the bodies to climb to the fourth floor. They were searching each room to see if there were any living souls remaining. They were also looking into the boxes, suitcases, and lockers in search of valuables. They could not enter a room on the fourth floor as it was locked from the inside. They broke into the room anyway. It was empty except for some scattered beddings and clothes. One of us was told to go to the roof and bring down the black flag* and the new Bangladesh flag*. When the flags were brought down, a soldier took those from us. We were ordered to go down and move the bodies on the stairs next to the previous pile on the street, under the tree.

Then we were taken to the two-storied house in front of that building (it used to be the housing for the provost of Salimullah Hall at that time). The front door was locked and could not be broken down even after significant effort. So we entered the house through the back. Near the back door, there was a dripping water tap. I was dying of thirst; so I requested permission to drink. But this infuriated the soldiers as they started yelling and cursing again, saying things like, "I'll pee on your face, that'll quench your thirst." We searched all the rooms of the house, upstairs and downstairs. There were no more bodies. There was nothing but scattered clothes, suitcases, boxes, turned on fans, etc. The soldiers searched and took all the valuables they could get their hands on. And though they desperately tried to reach the flag from the patio roof, they could not find a way to take it down. We were again gathered near the pile of bodies. There a soldier burned all the flags that had been collected.

We were told to carry the bodies again and head north. When we came close to Shib Bari, we saw that seven or eight soldiers were pointing a mortar gun at the house of Professor [Govinda Dev†](#). Two soldiers were carrying out a sewing machine and other loots from the house. We were told to carry the bodies through the collapsed wall of Jagannath Hall in front of the UOTC* building and gather them near the Shaheed Minar facing the North House. There was already a huge pile of dead bodies there. While two or three of us were carrying one body at a time, a lot of military trucks were standing on the side of the roads in full war gear monitoring us. We were even afraid to rest for a moment as the soldiers would charge at us threatening to open fire. All of us, who were still alive, huddled together as we moved about.

I don't remember how many corpses we had carried, but I remember the last body that we carried was of the gatekeeper Shunil. The body was still warm. Maybe it was because he had died just a while ago or because it had been lying under the sun. When we were halfway across the field from the road, we heard women screaming from the slums. Some of the slum women were trying to run towards the field and the military were stopping them by charging at them with machine guns. As I looked up, I saw the military were firing at the sweepers who were summoned away from us earlier, and the slum women were crying out loudly and trying to run and save their men. I realized that we were next. The other group of people, who were carrying the bodies and reached before we did, were already lined up before the firing range. One of them was reciting out loud the verses from the holy Quran. I had gotten a chance to know him briefly when we were sitting in front of the bank. He was from Kishoreganj, studying in Jagannath College*. He had come to visit his friend and was staying the night in the Hall. The guns fired. The recital stopped and everything was quiet.

Two of us moved Shunil's body to the west of the pile. There we found the body of Dr. Dev, wearing nothing but a dhoti*. His body was badly mutilated. At this sight the other boy who was with me said, "They have even killed Dr. Dev. Then what is left there to fear in death?" I don't know what I was thinking but I dropped Shunil's dead body and lied down beside Dr. Dev's body right there. I was too tired to stand and face imminent death. I closed my eyes and a thousand thoughts raced through my mind. But all the while I was anticipating that any moment they would kick me, make me get up, and put a bullet through me. At one point, I started to wonder maybe they had already killed me and I just didn't feel it. I was not in a state to feel anything at that point. I had lost all senses of being. I cannot tell how much time passed by like this.

I became aware of the sound of women and children crying near my head. Opening my eyes, I found the wives and children of the sweepers, gatekeepers, and gardeners wailing over the bodies of their husbands, fathers, and brothers. I saw Dulal, the youngest son of Gayanath, hugging the body of his brother Shankar and crying his heart out. Some of them still had a few breaths left and were begging for water. Some were giving them water. I saw one wounded person crawling past the Shaheed Minar. I carefully raised my head to look around and found that the military trucks were gone. I ducked my head among the grieving women and children and went inside the slum. I first entered the room of Chitbali, the electrician. He was not home. His wife was trembling. When I asked for some water, she pointed to a pot. I drank some water and asked to hide behind the pile of dried cow dung at the corner of the room. The woman got scared and started to scream. So I had to leave and hide in the toilet at the west end of the slum.

I could hear the sound of firing coming from Rajarbagh at this time. Each one was bloodcurdling. Maybe these were firings from tanks. I saw two fighter planes flying over. I spent a long time hiding there before someone knocked at the toilet's door. I thought this had to be the end: it must be the military. When I did not open the door, the person said, "Babu, don't be afraid, this is Idu." Idu ran a used bookstore on the other side of the road. He said, "I came to take the women to Mitford Hospital. When I heard you are also here, I came to get you too." At first I did not want to go. I could not figure out what was the right thing to do. He reassured me, "The roads are clear now. No more military." So I started with him in my blood-drenched clothes through the streets. We were near Bakshibazar, but I still did not see any more military trucks. But I saw their deeds: the burnt and demolished slums on both sides of the railroad. One or two women were trying to salvage what was left of their belongings. I saw a couple of folks doing Oju* (Wudu), washing themselves for Friday's Jumma prayer near a mosque.

Idu took me past the Jail (*Dhaka Central Jail - Editor*) to the banks of the Buriganga River. I saw many people crossing the river and fleeing to the other side. A boatman gave me a free ride. As soon as I stepped foot on the other side of the river, everyone surrounded me asking about what had happened on the opposite bank. Many were terrified to see the blood, now dried up all over my clothes and body. The day was nearly gone and I was still describing to the crowd the genocide that I had witnessed. Suddenly someone spotted me and yelled, “Is that you, Kali da?” Upon looking, I saw Sunirmal Sinha Chowdhury, an ex-resident of the Hall who was from Sylhet. I described the whole story to him. He took me to a nearby restaurant, sensing that I had been starving all day long. We had tea and singara. Then he took me to Shimulia, where he used to work. From there, I first went to Nawabganj and then around mid-April reached my village Dhamura in Barisal.

On that grisly night of the March 25, the brutal Pak Army killed the professors, students, gatekeepers, peons, gardeners, sweepers of Jagannath Hall and Dhaka University in such a barbaric way that cannot even be imagined in this day and age. The new generation can hardly picture how much blood was shed, how many lives were lost, and how many sacrifices had been made for this flag—for our independence. No nation in this world has shed this much blood for their independence.

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- The Bangladesh flag mentioned here is not the current flag; the current flag was adopted in 1972. The flag in 1971 had a yellow map of the country inside a red disc. The red disc was on a green field. * A black flag commemorates a sad event. The flag mentioned here was used, perhaps, to commemorate [February 21†](#).
 - *Dhoti* Dhoti is a garment typically worn by male Hindus. It is a piece of garment tied around the waist. Similar to a [lungi †](#). * *Jagannath Collage* Jagannath Collage, now Jagannath University, was a college established in 1858. The narrative mentions a student from Jagannath College who was residing temporarily in the [JagannathHall†](#).
 - *Oju* (Wudu) Oju is washing before a prayer by Muslims. This is a ritual to get to a clean state of body and mind before a prayer. * *University Officers’ Training Corps* (UOTC) Now Bangladesh National Cadet Corps (BNCC).
 - *Salimullah Muslim Hall* Salimullah Muslim Hall was inaugurated on August 11, 1931 as a student dorm of the University of Dhaka. It is named after Nawab Khwaja Salimullah Bahadur and well known for its architectural value.

Shell-shattered Newspaper Office

Abed Khan

Journalist, Cultural Activist, [The Daily Ittefaq†](#), Dhaka.
[Present: Continues to be a prominent journalist and columnist]

Memories fade. Today, as I try to recollect, I am appreciating that fact. I cannot retell the story word for word, but there are some memories even time cannot erase. I want to share those memories.
[March 25†](#), 1971. I was the co-editor of the newsroom at The [Daily Ittefaq†](#). I used to work the night-shift. Although back then there was no definite schedule for shifts. We used to stay at all times in the Ittefaq office to gather news. The local chapter of the [All-Party Resistance Council†](#) had been established in early March. I was the convener of that. It was the responsibility of the alliance to settle different disputes and to arrange various programs for the movement. As such, collecting the news of the hour was very important.

When I came to the office that evening, the situation of the capital was very disturbed and heated. Seraj [bhai†](#) (Martyr Serajuddin Hossain*) and Reza bhai (Late Asaf Ud Daula Reza) were already there. Syed Shahjahan from the reporting department was there too. Ameer Hossain bhai, a staff reporter, came in a little later. Yahya Bakht, a co-worker, was also working the night-shift. An artist for Ittefaq, Sarwar, also came in. As soon as I came to the office, I was asked to translate the directions from the [Awami League†](#) high command from the teleprinter. I was also documenting the news that we were getting over the telephone. On top of that, I had to attend to the visitors stopping by, anxiously asking about the latest situation. The most annoying part was receiving the eager and anxious phone calls. Most of them were asking about the talk between [Mujib†](#) (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) and [Yahya†](#) (Khan). Some of those conversations went like—

-- “Hey, what’s the news? Heard that the talk failed? Do you know anything?”
-- “Hello, Ittefaq? Is Yahya Khan really gone? Do you have any latest information about this?”
-- “Hello, who’s this? Do you know if the army has been deployed?”
-- “Is this Ittefaq? There’s a lot of gunfire going on here. Is it true that tanks will be deployed? Have you got any news about this?”
-- “Is this The Ittefaq office? What’s the news about Sheikh Saheb (Sheikh Mujibur Rahman)? We heard Yahya and [Bhutto†](#) (Zulfikar Ali Bhutto) are going to arrest him?”
-- “Brother, don’t need the details, just tell us—is the news good or bad?”

Numerous phone-calls like these were coming in. At one point, I asked, “Seraj bhai, how am I supposed to work if I have to answer so many calls?” He told me that I had to multitask. So, with ears on the phone, answers on my lips, and eyes on the news, I carried on.

We were politely telling the anxious callers that we didn’t know anything yet. It was unbelievable to think at the time that the Pak Army would be deployed on the streets to attack the protesting civilians.

At around 10:45 p.m., Seraj bhai called out to me, “Hey, make a small report on the news we’re getting over the phone on all the gunfires and explosions; refer to it as a rumor.” So, I wrote the report. There was due reason behind the instruction from Seraj bhai. We were receiving all sorts of information, but nothing from trustworthy sources. At around 10:35 p.m., I received a phone call from the Radio Office (The radio transmission from the Dhaka Station had already ended at around 10:30 p.m.). The gentleman who called was scared, “I want to give you some information just in case...” he said. “A while ago, an army convoy came by and left some stuff against the inside wall of the radio office. They

seemed to be up to no good. I think something bad is going to happen.” Then he hung up. Seraj Bhai asked me to write the report right after I told him about this phone call.

Meanwhile, we could hear some of the shootings. We thought they were probably some local hand-bombs or crackers going off. We also heard screams. We kept on working. It was getting quieter. It was sometime between half past eleven and quarter to twelve when all of a sudden, it sounded like there were fireworks going off. The sound of gunfire became louder and louder. We could hear automatic rifles. Machine guns and Chinese rifles seemed to be embroiled in a roaring contest. All of us in the newsroom then realized that the Pak Army had been deployed on the streets of the capital. The destruction had begun. Reza bhai and Seraj bhai both asked me to make a phone call to [Dhamondi 32 Number†](#) (Sheikh Mujib’s residence). So I called. The phone kept on ringing, but no one was picking up. Reza bhai guessed that probably the line had been cut. Meanwhile, another assistant editor, Habibur Rahman Milon had arrived. He was out to inspect the city. As the situation deteriorated, he came to the office to inform us. He told us about all the army convoys running about the city. Reporter Ameer Hossain quickly finished his write-up and started for home.

A little later, the phone rang. It was Ehtesham Haider Chowdhury from The Daily Purbodosh. I picked up the phone. Haider bhai inquired whether we were still working. I replied that we were. He said, “We can’t. We are surrounded by all these shootings. You guys, please, carry on so that The Ittefaq is published. So that the people get the latest orders from [Bangabandhu†](#) tomorrow...” Then there was a small sound and we got disconnected.

The gunshots were getting louder. Seraj bhai decided that it wasn’t safe anymore to work upstairs. We had to publish the paper. It would be safer to work downstairs in the machine-room, with just a low-powered light kept on. At this point, Syed Shahjahan and I went up to the newly constructed second floor roof of the Ittefaq office building. There were fires everywhere and sounds of gunshots. At times, there were phosphorus flares going up in the sky, lighting up the surroundings like daylight. These would be immediately followed by the sound of machine guns and other automatic weapons being fired. We heard the wails of innocent civilians, the sounds of military convoys. A vehicle came by firing rounds. Shahjahan bhai scolded me as I tried to sneak a peek. We came down from the roof, straight to the machine-room downstairs. A dummy of the paper was completed. After finishing our work, we came back upstairs to the news room on the second floor stealthily. We started talking in the dark, discussing politics and the situation.

The night grew older, dawn was nearing. Except for a few, all the people from the press section left in groups in the darkness. Sixteen or seventeen people remained—mostly journalists, plus the canteen manager, two canteen boys, peon Anzad Molla, two guards, and an outsider. Near dawn, Seraj bhai, Reza bhai, and I went to a small wooden balcony on the wooden staircase of the second floor to look outside. The streets were empty; the light posts stood as if they were stunned, dimly illuminating the roads. We could still hear shots being fired and heavy vehicles rolling. We saw an army convoy coming from the direction of Madhumita movie theater, firing bullets at the buildings around. We immediately ducked for cover as there were bullets coming in our direction too. We crawled to get inside. We were lucky to hit the ground in time because the wall where we were standing was riddled with bullet-holes within minutes. All three of us would have been shot if we remained standing there. The convoy passed by and went towards Narayanganj. Suddenly, we heard someone moaning. We looked up to find one of the teenage canteen boys shot in the head and soaked in blood. The canteen manager and I tried to stop the bleeding with pads of newsprint paper. But it wasn’t working. Pad after pad was getting drenched in blood. We realized he would not live long—he would die right there in The Ittefaq office. There was no chance we could find a doctor amidst all this. The canteen manager, two men from the press, a guard and I decided that we would leave the boy inside the Gopibagh mosque. The mowlana (religious leader) there would probably notice him during [Azaan†](#) and he might be able to manage some medical assistance. But our colleagues did not agree, because going outside meant facing certain death. We still decided to go. Five of us carried him to the mosque. After putting him down on the floor, the others then left towards Gopibagh while I went back to the office hopping over the closed gate. Then I heard another military truck coming from the direction of Motijheel. On the other side, an unsuspecting peon was approaching on a bicycle from the direction of Tikatuli towards the gate of The Ittefaq office to collect the morning papers. As I entered the office and climbed the stairs to the newsroom, a round of bullets showered the Ittefaq office. We all ducked for cover, either hitting the ground or hiding behind the steel cabinets. But that poor peon was shot dead.

We sat there, speechless. It seemed like we would never be able to get out of this place. Several more Pak Army trucks came afterwards, fired weapons, and then went towards Tikatuli. It was morning by then. As we looked outside through the back balcony, we noticed this one truck stopping in front of the Abhishar (movie theater). One by one, those killers jumped out of the truck, and started shooting randomly. After a while, they went away. I told the others that the office was not safe anymore because already there had been two deaths inside the office.

But where would we go? I lived at Doyaganj. Seraj bhai lived at Chamelibagh, Reza bhai at Shahjahanpur, Milon bhai at Moghbazar, Shahjahan bhai at Gendaria, and Bakht at Swamibagh. The Pak Army was still heavily patrolling the main roads. At around 11 a.m., I became restless and went out. My pants and shirt were covered all over with the blood of that poor canteen boy. My heart was heavy but I had to find a shelter. I managed to somehow get out through the back of the office and finally reached Abhay Das Lane. From there, I reached the Dhaka-Narayanganj highway through Swamibagh. As I tried to cross it, I saw three military trucks going towards Jatrabari while shooting indiscriminately. There was a deep sewerage drain in front of the Swamibagh Community Center. I took shelter there. As soon as the trucks passed, I crossed the road and ran for home along the rail-tracks.

At around 3 p.m., two tanks stopped in front of The Ittefaq office. Their cannons were aimed at the building. Several soldiers entered the office and spread something over the equipment inside. At that time, our coworkers were preparing for a simple meal of rice and lentil soup that was sent to them from a neighboring house. All of a sudden, there was a loud bang as the cannons fired. The machine-room downstairs caught fire. Everyone upstairs ran to the rooftop and climbed down the wall of the next building. Some of them had big, wet newsprints wrapped over their heads to protect themselves from the fire as they ran past the fire and toppled over the side walls to safety. The fire blazed. I got the news around 4 p.m. I remembered all my coworkers. I thought none of them were alive anymore. So I went back to office again following the same route along the rail-line and through Swamibagh that I had taken home earlier. I saw that our Ittefaq office was on fire and there was no one to put it out.

I went back home. The thought of all my colleagues burning in that fire haunted me. I came to know about the detailed story of the cannon fire and their story of saving themselves a lot later. Afterwards, when I crossed the border to India, I was the first one to describe the details of the mortars at The Ittefaq office through the Indian radio. Not only The Daily Ittefaq, but The People and The Daily Sangbad offices were also burnt to ashes on that night of March 25. And in that fire at The Sangbad office, the talented poet and journalist Shaheed Saber was burnt to his death.

□ Serajuddin Hossain Refer to [The Daily Ittefaq†](#).

The Bullet That Pierced

Nazrul Islam

Artist, Cartoonist, working in the Advertise and Marketing Agency, Dhaka

[Present: Continues as artist and cartoonist]

“**M**alum hota saala Bangali admi. Separation mangta. Sab ek line me khara ho ... You Bangali scoundrels! You want separation! Stand in a line!” We tried to plead with them in a mix of Bangla and [Urdu†](#), “Please take us to your officers. Don’t kill us here. If we are proven guilty in a trial, we will not argue that decision.”

But they refused to give an ear to any of our pleas. One soldier charged at us with his rifle’s grip held high as we were making a delay in forming the line. Seeing no other alternative, the three of us stood in a line in front of a bed. One of the soldiers took position to fire. That was on [March 26†](#), 1971. I was a student of the then East Pakistan Arts College (now the Arts Institute*).

Our Arts College dormitory was located in the west side of the post office at [New Market†](#). Most of the students had left the dormitory for their respective villages, realizing that the situation in the city was deteriorating. But I thought if a war were inevitable, then its terror would reach the villages and towns alike—there was no point in going home. So I stayed behind, alone in my dorm room. The mess hall in the dormitory was shut down. I had my dinner in a restaurant located behind the New Market—and then walked up to the Balaka movie theater to feel the pulse of the city. It was 8:25 p.m. by then.

I met an old acquaintance on the road. He was a security officer at the [East Pakistan Rifles \(EPR\)†](#). Their camp was beside our dormitory. He used to come to our dormitory every now and then. He was surprised to see me, “Why haven’t you left for your village? You should have. I have sent my family to safety in our village. The situation in the city is getting quite tense. Soldiers from West Pakistan are landing secretly at the airport in the dead of the night, every night. Go back to your dorm room immediately, and be very careful.”

I met another friend on my way back to the dormitory. He had come to Dhaka from my village in search of a job after passing B.Com. about two months ago. He was staying with his sister. He said that he wanted to stay with me in my dormitory as her sister’s house was quite small. Since I was alone in my room, I gladly agreed to this proposal. I thought to myself that at least I will have a companion. The last few days, I had been speculating about Bangladesh, Bangalis, and what might be in store for us. I had even forgotten to change the date on my desk calendar. I turned the page from March 23, 1971 to [March 25†](#), 1971 and told my friend to freshen up. I myself also washed up and stood by the railings at the balcony in front of my room.

I was in room number nine. One of my roommates had bought a cassette player using the money from his scholarship. I was standing in the balcony watching the people in the street and listening to some songs on that player. There were a number of banyan trees in front of our dormitory. Some people were cutting those down to build barricades on the road.

Suddenly all the electric lights around us went out. Only our dormitory and the surrounding houses had electricity. It was about 10 p.m. We heard gunfire from the no. 3 gate of the EPR camp (now the BDR camp) by the dormitory. Within moments, the war had started.

I rushed inside my room and closed the doors and windows. But due to heavy gunfire, I could not close one window at the rear of my room. I could feel the bullets pounding our building. The soldiers of the East Pakistan Rifles were fighting against the West Pakistan military. We could not hear each other over the sound of firing. I thought about crawling to the window to close it, but then thought better of it as a bullet could shatter my hand. The window remained open.

Suddenly our room was flooded by a searchlight through the open window. We panicked, thinking that we had become the target. We had nowhere to run. The fight outside had become more intense. We could hear the dogs and foxes howling from the Azimpur graveyard in front of the dormitory, and decided that it was not safe to go outside.

We could hear the shouts for help from the slums surrounding our dormitory. Through the windows, as we raised our heads a bit, we could see the slums burning. The searchlight flooded our room again. We thought we were doomed. We took shelter in the wall-closet where we usually kept our suitcases. As there were brick-walls on both sides, we thought they might protect us from the bullets.

When the searchlight went off, we were exhausted from the stress and desperate for some rest. We lay down on our beds not caring about the bullets anymore. We wanted to sleep, but sleep eluded us.

The heavy gunfire went on all through the night to the break of dawn. We could hear the Fajr [Azaan†](#) (call for morning prayer) from the mosques.

At that time, the sound of firing subsided a bit. I changed the desk calendar to March 26, 1971.

I looked out through the rear window and found that some of the other students who stayed behind in the dormitory, Lutful [bhai†](#), Jahangir bhai, and Paresh [da†](#), were fleeing in the [lungis†](#) they had been wearing at night. Lutful bhai had a briefcase in his hand.

I hurried to the front windows and saw some military Jeeps roaming around in the streets. The sound of bullets never really ceased. But I thought that this would be the moment to leave the dormitory and look for some safe place. I started to get ready and told my friend to do the same. At that time, Shahnewaj bhai, a senior student who used to live in room number two on the ground floor, came to my room.

He said he had some breakfast ready in his room and we could join him. He forbade us to peek outside, “I heard on the radio that if anybody tries to peek, he/she will be shot down.” I asked him if he knew any news from the outside. He, always the funny man, quipped, “[Joy Bangla†](#), Thela Shamla... Victory for Bangladesh, now pay for it.”

The three of us decided that it was high time we left the dormitory and got ready. But as soon as we opened the door, we found four armored tanks stopping in front of the dormitory gates facing east. Each of these tanks had an artillery gun and about fifteen to twenty military men camouflaged in leaves. The barrels of the cannons were targeted at our dormitory. Some of the soldiers were trying to take a look inside the dormitory through binoculars.

We were looking through a glass window. But remembering the announcement on the radio, we quickly ducked under the window. We were startled to hear the sound of boots climbing up the stairs. They were coming to the first floor. We got underneath the beds so that they would not see us through the window.

We breathed in relief when they walked past our room but did not enter. The sound of boots went directly to the rooftop. It seemed like a number of people were on the roof, and sounded as if they were running or jumping around. Somebody was pounding the water tanks on the roof with his rifle. Then it all became silent. We were really confused.

We peeked through the rear window again and saw that the soldiers were throwing paper bags filled with some kind of powder on the neighboring slums from the roof of our dormitory. Then they shot several rounds of bullets, and the slums caught fire instantly. When the people from the slums ran out fleeing, they opened fire. They cheered as people dropped down dead, “*Mar gaya saala, Bangali admi mar gaya* ... Dead! The bastard Bangalis are dead!”

We looked at the clock; it was 6 a.m. The military got down from the roof. We could hear the boots coming nearer. They halted in front of our room and started banging on the door, “Who’s inside? Open up!” We again got under our beds so that they would not see us. We did not respond to them and held our breath.

The room adjacent to ours was also locked, but it was empty. The military broke down the door of that room, searched it, and came back to ours again. We feared that they might break down our door too. Thinking that the situation might get worse if they found out we were hiding there and did not open the door for them, Shahnewaj bhai opened the door.

As soon as the door was opened, one of the soldiers pointed his rifle at us. We were sitting on the floor two feet away from the rifle. The man did not say anything, only grunted like a wild boar.

Using a mix of Bangla and Urdu, we said, “Please come inside, have a seat. What is happening? We are really scared.” We did not know if the others understood our mixed language, but it felt like at least the man who was pointing his rifle at us, did not understand anything. To be honest, it seemed like he did not understand any language at all. The rest of them were standing at the door. One of them asked, “What do you do?”

We again replied in our mixed language, “We are artists, we paint, make pictures. We live by the money we get from selling those.”

They demanded in Urdu, “Tell the truth, we will let you go.” We replied again, “We are artists.” Then one of them said, “Seems like these scoundrels are Bangalis. They want separation. Make them stand in a line.”

We said, “Take us to your officers or to the [cantonment](#) †. If we are found guilty in a trial, then punish us.”

“Shut up and stand in line!” one of them charged with the butt of his rifle. After a brief conversation like this, we were forced to stand in a line. We stood side by side in front of a bed, facing the door. All the soldiers came inside and stood against the wall, but they did not come near us. One of them was standing by the door. He started loading his rifle with the bullets from his belt. Then he cocked the rifle, aimed at us, and fired. My friend tumbled down forward onto the floor.

One of the military came to check him. The bullet had hit him in his right chest. The rifle fired again. Shahnewaj bhai jerked backwards and fell upon the bed behind. When he cocked his rifle again pointing it at me, I realized it was my turn.

I turned my face to the right so that I would not have to see it. But I was not afraid anymore. I just felt a great sorrow that they would hide our bodies and desecrate them.

When I turned my face, my body from the waist up turned as well. But the part from the waist to feet was still facing them. Then they fired. The bullet hit my left rib cage. I could not feel the bullet or the pain, just a hollow feeling inside my chest. Since I was prepared, I did not lose my balance. As soon as the bullet hit me, I sat down on the bed. Then I thought that they had checked my friend before. If they see me sitting on the bed, they might check and fire again. So I pretended to fall down on the bed by Shahnewaj bhai. I do not know how I managed to think so calmly at that moment. Everything seemed to have happened all at once.

I had not lost my consciousness yet. But I closed my eyes and pretended to be dead. I heard the military men talking in Urdu, “Search their shirts, their suitcases. There might be some money in them.” They also broke down the wall closet. They found the cassette player there and said, “Gramophone! Let’s play it. Where is the handle to turn it on?” The idiots did not even realize that it ran on electricity. After messing around with the stuff in the room and merrymaking for some time, they left.

The three of us were left there, hurt, without any hope to go on living.

People die when they are shot from afar in processions. And they had shot us from such a close range. I did not think that we would make it alive. Suddenly Shahnewaj bhai stirred beside me and breathed heavily. But it did not sound normal. It felt like blood has clotted near his throat. Then he became all quiet. I slowly put my hand on him, his body was cold. I was thinking that my friend who was shot first might have died by then, and now Shahnewaj bhai was also dead.

I was waiting for my death too. Time went on, it was almost midday.

I became restless lying on my side, so I turned to lie on my back. As soon as I moved I felt the warmth of blood on the bed. I breathed in the air, but as I exhaled I felt air going out through a hole in my back, and blood gushing out as well.

Of course I was afraid. But the thought of doctors or medication seemed far-fetched at that moment. There was a curfew in effect outside. I thought—if I breathe heavily and let more blood out, I might die quickly... living like this would be more painful; I would rather try to die quickly!

But even though I tried by breathing heavily, I did not die. Only my heartbeat slowed down.

I had sent two drawings themed on the struggle to the editor of the Literature Page of The Daily Pakistan newspaper in March 1971; I do not remember the exact date. One of those drawings was published in the Literature Page of The Daily Bangla after the liberation. I do not know if the other one was ever published, in March 1971 or at any other time.

At that moment, those two drawings came to my mind and I wondered if I had drawn those in vain.

I was feeling very uncomfortable. I did not know how long I might have to suffer. Slowly, the evening started to set in. Suddenly, I heard the sound of boots of the military again. They were coming towards our room. I speculated from the sound that they must be fifteen to twenty in number. I closed my eyes again.

They came inside the room. But I was surprised when one of them exclaimed in Urdu, “Alas, who killed these innocent people? Why would they do that? There is still God, and they will suffer the consequences.”

I was hopeful as I heard these words. But they were speaking in Urdu. So I did not dare to open my eyes.

Then they checked on my friend lying on the floor and said, “He will not live long.” They also checked Shahnewaj bhai beside me and declared him dead. At last they touched me. I was very thirsty and my lips were trembling. They understood and said, “Give him some water, he might still live.”

Then they gave me some water and blessed me in Urdu, “Stay with us, son!” And then, just like that, they were gone.

I became hopeful. I pulled myself up to a sitting position. I looked at the dead body of Shahnewaj bhai, then I looked at my friend. He was still alive! I told him, "Let's find some safe place."

I found a glass and a bottle beside us. That was the bottle they had used to give us water. The bottle was not for drinking, rather we would use it as a flower vase sometimes.

We could still hear the sound of the occasional gunfire. We got out of our room and came down. Through an opening in the barbed fence, we got out of the dormitory.

We went to the room of our teacher Mr. Kabir who used to live behind the dormitory. The room was completely empty. After a while, another one of our teachers, Mr. Jabbar came there. He had left the dormitory in the morning and taken refuge in a house nearby. He could see everything going on in our dormitory from there. He had seen us coming to Mr. Kabir's room.

We were panting from exhaustion. We wanted some drinking water from Mr. Jabbar. He gave us the water, but it seemed like he was at a loss. He held the glass from a distance and kept saying, "Here, drink water, drink some." We could not drink. A little later, he left the room and brought someone else with him, Selim. Selim was a service holder, a bachelor who used to live in a house nearby. The two of them took us to Selim's place and took care of us for the rest of the night.

The next day, March 27, 1971, Selim said that it was not safe for us to remain there and we should go to Dhaka College*, where a number of people had taken refuge. I agreed and started to get up, but fainted.

When I regained my consciousness, I found Selim pouring water over my head. This was the first time I had lost consciousness after being wounded by the bullet. From that moment on, whenever I tried to get up, I fainted. Selim carried me on his shoulders to Dhaka College.

At 8 a.m. in the morning, the curfew was lifted for two hours. Selim and Mr. Jabbar took this opportunity to admit me and my friend to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital*.

After we had been admitted, Mr. Jabbar left. But Selim came to us and said, "I will come again. Do not worry, you will get better." It seemed like he wanted to say something more, but thought better of it. He left hurriedly with a depressed expression on his face.

I was released from the hospital seventeen days later, though I was not fully recovered.

[December 16](#) †, 1971 - Bangladesh became independent. I went to Selim's house, looking for him but could not find him. His landlord, who also lived nearby, said, "He left with you guys— that is the last time I saw him."

If Selim had not taken us under his protection and provided us with shelter and medication that day, we would not have survived. We are ever grateful to him, but never got the chance to express our gratitude. We have searched high and low for him, enquired about him, but could not find any news of him. In our hearts, we believe that he went to the war and sacrificed his life for us, immortalizing himself like the rest of the 3 million martyrs.

May his soul rest in peace in heaven.

□ *Arts Institute* Established as Government Art House under the leadership of the famous painter Zainul Abedin. In 1962, it turned into East Pakistan College of Arts and Crafts. It was renamed as Bangladesh College of Arts and Crafts after 1971. Now it is called Faculty of Fine Art under the [University of Dhaka](#) †.

□ *Dhaka College* A premier college in Bangladesh. Originally started as an English school in 1835, it was given the college status in 1846. The college moved to its current location near [New Market](#) † in 1921.

□ *Dhaka Medical College* The leading Medical College (and Hospital) in Bangladesh. It started as the hospital for the [University of Dhaka](#) † before being established as a college in 1946. Throughout the years, Dhaka Medical College has been a bed rock for revolutions and protests. During the war in 1971, many students, staff, and nurses actively participated in the war while many others remained in the hospital and treated the injured risking their lives. Even after liberation, Dhaka Medical College has played a key role in establishing democracy in Bangladesh.

When Moazzem Became a Martyr

Abdullah Khaled

Businessman, Dhaka

I don't remember the date but the year was 1969. It was the year when humans first landed on the moon. Considering the importance of the news, many may have remembered the month and the day, maybe even the hour. I also put great importance on that news and saved that day's newspaper with the headline 'Man on the moon' for my one and a half year old son. We thought it would be the most important incident since his birth. When he grew up he would see this news clipping and reminisce his childhood.

But the vicious incidents we witnessed right after this amazing success from mankind would erase all those pleasant images from our memories. I don't remember when, during those nine months of 1971, we lost that mental capability to keep track of time. Two stories can properly describe how badly the horrific scenes of '71 had scarred the mind of my three year old son. These two incidents took place on the 17th and the 18th of December, 1971. On December 17, the day after our independence, around two o'clock I was returning home on a rickshaw with my wife and son after roaming through different places of Dhaka. We were heading towards our home through Elephant Road from Shahbagh. We had mixed feelings, both happy and sad. Happy, because finally we were free, and sad to learn that, as a price for that liberty, we had lost some of our loved ones. About the same time a huge convoy of the [Mukti Bahini](#) † and [Allied Forces](#) † was victoriously entering the city through that same road. The public were welcoming them by waving their hands. Instinctively, I too raised my hand and started waving at them out of joy and gratitude. Noticing that, my son suddenly grabbed my hand and whispered to me, "Dad, lower your hand. Please lower your hand or they'll shoot you too." When I saw him crying in terror, I couldn't contain myself either. I wept silently. I remember this incident vividly to this day, even which

shirt I was wearing. I get emotional every time I tell this story to someone.

The very next day, a military captain, who was a relative of the family staying upstairs in our building, came to visit them. There were three armed escorts waiting in the Jeep. As soon as the Jeep stopped in front of our building, my son cried out and ran to his mother in the kitchen and started screaming, "Ma, they have come to kill us again." His crying and screaming created such a chaos, that many got curious and gathered in the house to find out what was going on. Nobody could stop his crying or make him understand what was going on. It was confusing for others, too. His wailing got worse as the three armed escorts entered the house to find out what the chaos was about. When I explained everything to the [Jawans](#) † of the army, they understood and proposed, "Let us try to break your son's fear." So the three of them took my son to their Jeep and played with him, and spent about two hours to finally convince him that people wearing Khaki were not always going to kill. The war was over and now that everyone was a friend, there was nothing to fear.

Even though my son understood then that the war was over and there was nothing to fear—no one in a Khaki uniform (the Pakistan military uniform) would come to kill us again—I fail to understand it even to this day. I should mention here that I myself had spent a part of my life wearing the Khaki uniform and spent nights with those savage people, ate at the same table, but at that time I didn't think I would ever fear them.

Since [March 26](#) †, all other incidents have become dull in memory except one which is still vivid. The time, day, and the people of this event have taken a permanent place in my memory, which can never be erased. Because I firmly believe, nothing more barbaric can ever take place in the history of humankind.

However, I still don't know how I could be a witness to such a horrific killing and still be alive. Perhaps they somehow miscalculated. My young son also witnessed the same event, the scars of which haunted his early childhood as I've just mentioned.

Towards the end of 1970, I was working in the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC). That is where I met Lt. Commander Moazzem Hossain, one of the main convicts in the [Agartala Conspiracy Case](#) †. He used to visit often regarding projects and through chit chats we found out that we were also distantly related through my in-laws. Through this connection, when the upstairs floor of the house he was staying in was vacated, I moved in there with my family. That house is currently known as 'Hotel Blue Nile'. Many important people used to visit him every now and then. Around March 20, 1971, he sent his parents and sister to his village home. When I asked him the reason he said, "The situation doesn't seem to be favorable here, that's why I sent them away." He added that he was spending the nights elsewhere with his family those days.

When I asked him more about the situation, he said, "We may have to battle a strong force."

I had to say, "But that would be a very unfair battle and we would die by the millions."

He got very excited hearing this and exclaimed, "Don't talk rubbish. Do you think they'll drag us out of our homes and kill us?"

I still feel flabbergasted to think how ironic it was that he was the one who got dragged out from that same house and was killed in the middle of the road.

On the night of [March 25](#) †, for whatever reason—it could be fate—Moazzem Hossain stayed behind in the Elephant Road house with his family. The event that took place that night, we all know more or less.

Around midnight he brought his wife, two sons, and only daughter to our home on the first floor and went downstairs alone. He said, "I have a few colleagues downstairs, I am going to stay with them."

Sometime between 5 and 6 o'clock in the morning, when he came upstairs to talk to his wife, my wife informed me that the army had surrounded our house. Before she could finish her words, about six or seven Khansena (Pakistani soldiers) broke in through the living room door with a loud bang. Everyone in the house, started to scream out of fear. From our home they dragged me, Mr. Moazzem, and our servant Abdul Latif downstairs. We were the only three males in the house. When we were waiting downstairs, another group of soldiers brought down Mr. Sabur, who worked in the Shilpa Bank*, from the second floor and made him stand next to us. An army captain who was waiting downstairs looked up and yelled in Urdu, "Search for the file."

I noticed that a Bangali guy in a pair of trousers and [panjabi](#) † standing next to the garages on the road was signaling something to him. Suddenly the captain shouted, "Wait! I am coming", and headed upstairs to search for the file himself. I hadn't realized what was going to happen next, when a rugged looking soldier asked the [Havildar](#) †, "Should I kill them all?"

The Havildar replied with a straight face, "Wait till the boss comes down."

It was then that I realized—this would be the end for us.

Later, I learned from my wife that the captain had asked her where the file was. My wife answered that there was no file; that I was just another civil servant and any documents or papers in the house were all on the bookshelf. The next question was where Mrs. Moazzem was hiding. My wife cleverly answered that they used to live downstairs, and as new tenants we didn't know their whereabouts when all the while Mrs. Moazzem and her children were standing in that same room.

The captain came down and interrogated Mr. Sabur who was standing first in the line. He cursed at him and asked, "Do you want Bangladesh? *Bolo Pakistan Zindabad* ... Say, long live Pakistan! Go! Get out of here, get upstairs."

Second in the line was my house-help Abdul Latif. When they asked his name and occupation, he answered that he worked as a cook for the family living upstairs. The captain ordered, "Say long live Pakistan! Now get out of here!" Next in line was Mr. Moazzem. The captain asked him, "What is your name?" To which he answered boldly, "Lt. Commander Moazzem."

The captain then spoke in English, "So you wanted to become the Commander-in-Chief of the Bangladesh Army. I will make you the Commander-in-Chief of Bangladesh Army. Wait!"

Then the captain turned to me asking my name and occupation. I answered that I was a civil servant. The captain again asked in Urdu, "Why did you protest? Do you want Bangladesh?" I don't remember exactly what I said but I probably answered something like, "I go to work regularly, but the office is usually closed." Suddenly the captain barked at me, "Get out of here! Quick! Get out!" The staircase to the first floor was only three to four yards away and I ran towards it. There were seven or eight soldiers in Khaki uniform armed with rifles and sten guns facing Mr. Moazzem.

Some of the rifles were constantly being fired aimlessly all this time to keep away curious onlookers from the windows. Since I had heard gunshots all through the night, I didn't pay any particular attention to them any longer as dawn broke. Or maybe because I had already realized the bitter ending of the event, the gunshot didn't bother me much. But even amidst all that gunfire, as I was approaching the staircase, I clearly heard, "Finish him," and the shots that followed.

I turned around and witnessed the merciless killing of Lt. Commander Moazzem. He fell on his face, the ground beneath him soaked red

from his blood in a moment. I quickly got upstairs. Both my wife and Mrs. Moazzem asked, “What happened?” I thought for a second before answering, “They have killed uncle.” My wife had already seen the whole incident from the window upstairs but still couldn’t believe it. I also did not believe it for a long time that it was possible to call someone out to their porch and kill him. When I was young, I had read about the barbarism of Genghis Khan and Nadir Shah, and thanked God many times for having been born in an age that was far removed from their brutality. Never did I think that such barbarism could be reenacted.

The army left. The gunshots were not heard anymore. The sun got brighter in the sky. When I looked down the window, I saw splatters of blood in the courtyard. They had even taken the body of Moazzem. I still cannot forget the grisly details of his murder. I was the only eye witness. But let me mention another relevant incident. On March 27, when the curfew was lifted, we left the house in Elephant Road and took shelter in a house in [Old Dhaka](#) †. There, one evening I met an ex-minister of [Ayub Khan’s](#) † cabinet who said during a conversation, “The rumors that are running wild are unbelievable. They are saying that they have killed Lt. Commander Moazzem, but someone has already seen him today.”

I only asked him, “Have you seen him?” and the answer was, “No”.

I simply replied, “They killed him just 2 yards away from me. I was right there.”

□ *Shilpa Bank* Merged on to the Bangladesh Development Bank Limited now. BDBL is a fully state owned commercial bank. It provides financial and technical assistance to the industries in the private and public sector.

Facing Death

Moslema Khatun

Educator, Retired professor, English, The College of Home Economics, Dhaka*

I woke up startled around midnight. Bang! Bang! I heard the noise of intermittent gunshots. Then began the incessant firing. Quickly I got off the bed, gathered the children, and stood in the middle of the dining room. All hell broke loose! In a few moments, the night turned into a horror. That was the black night of [March 25](#) †. Different kinds of loud bangs were heard simultaneously. ‘Kaboom!’ went the heavy bombs, ‘Rat-tat-tat’ went the machine guns, ‘Whoosh!’ went something cutting through the thick air with a trailing sound. Some objects similar to firecrackers headed towards the sky and lit up the whole room through the glass on the doors and windows. Bullets were being fired at random directions. Any moment a bullet could come shattering through the glass and hit any one of us. Feeling lost, we took the children to the small space in front of the bathroom, which seemed a little safer place to be. My girls, Raj, Naj, and Shan were terrified and gathered close to their father. Shan was trembling with fear. Sakib, my son, was hugging me. The gunfire went on continuously. What a terrible noise that was!

The College of Home Economics* is right next to the [University](#) † campus. Within the college campus, there are the dormitory for the girls and our, i.e., teachers’ residential building. It sounded like most of the gunshots were coming from [Iqbal Hall](#) †, Mohsin Hall, and the [Shaheed Minar](#) †. There was also sound of firing from the opposite direction. In between the gunshots, you could hear the people screaming and wailing. The glow of fire was all around. Slowly the smoke and the flames became even more evident. The whole city seemed to have been set ablaze. It felt as if this unbearable night would never end. Around dawn, we heard an announcement over the megaphone—martial law had been enacted. Curfew was in place indefinitely.

The night ended, but the firing didn’t. There was no way of knowing what was happening or how everyone was. The telephones were not working. When day broke, one of our neighbors from the second floor and another one from the third floor came down to talk, but went back upstairs soon. Everyone had been awake the whole night. Fear had left its mark on everyone’s face. I turned on the radio only to hear a harsh voice announcing martial law and curfew in Urdu and English. “If anyone breaches the curfew and steps out, they’ll be shot at sight.” Who’d dare going out even if there wasn’t any curfew? The occasional gunfire could be heard every now and then. Dogs were barking but no human voice could be heard outside. Fire was burning in front of the [New Market](#) †, smokes covering the sky on the horizon. Slums outside the east wall of the college were also engulfed in fire and smoke. I couldn’t understand what was burning, or who was burning.

The college gatekeeper Abed Ali came panting at one point to tell us that there were three or four people dead on the college ground. Last night, when they were trying to escape from Iqbal Hall, they were shot while climbing the college wall. I felt awful hearing this, but what could we do but keep quiet for the moment? Abed Ali returned a little later. He was really scared and told us that armed soldiers from the streets were strictly ordering to take down ‘the flag’ from the roof, or they would open fire. I suddenly remembered that we had hoisted the Bangladesh flag on the roof. What were we to do? Who would dare go up to the roof amidst all the gunfire? A few moments later, I was startled to find out that Mahfuz, a boy of twelve or thirteen who used to stay in our house, had brought down the flag during a break in the gunfire. Thankfully he didn’t get shot.

The day grew longer. No one had any appetite for food. But our cook, Buddhu’s mom (*It is common to refer to a help with reference to his or her son or daughter – Editor*), served some food and tea on the table. My sister-in-law Najma and her four month old daughter Ragini were with us. Her husband, my brother-in-law, Mustak, worked in Karachi. The daughter of my elder brother, Khushumoni was also staying with us. She was a student of the College and lived in the dormitory. I was the superintendent of the dormitory at the time. As per the suggestion of our Principal Hamida Khanam, I had vacated the dormitory a few days ago and instructed all the female students to leave for their respective homes; therefore my niece was staying with us. At that moment of disaster, I was thankful that I had listened to Hamida Madam’s suggestion.

Earlier in the day, we couldn’t have even thought that such violence would occur. But we had a hunch that something was going to happen. Around ten or eleven o’clock on the previous morning, my brother-in-law Mujaddid visited us with a few of his friends. Moshir Rahman, captain of Pakistan International Airlines (P.I.A.) and also the brother of one of my sisters-in-law, also stopped by around the same time. Captain

Rahman had come from Karachi to Dhaka on duty, but he had no intention of doing his 'duty' or going back to Karachi. He often visited our place to discuss the political situation in the country with my husband, Professor Noman. During that day's discussion over tea, everybody was very worried and troubled. They were saying that there was no hope of the [Mujib](#) †- [Yahya](#) † talk to be successful. They shared some more dire news before returning home.

After sunset, Noman and Mujaddid took a stroll outside and came back gravely worried. They heard rumors that Yahya had secretly left for West Pakistan and the army had been deployed on the streets. Tanks were also coming. There was a dark vibe everywhere around the city. Mujaddid immediately left for the house in Green Road where my mother-in-law lived with her younger sons. From the glass panes on the third floor staircase of our building, we saw the angry mob and students cut down a huge tree between Azimpur Colony and our college to block the road. They also created a barricade on the road to Nilkhet. There were shops on both sides of that road. In no time, some daredevil boys dug deep holes from one end of the road to the other. We were dumbstruck by all this activity and came downstairs to meet the neighbors. They were all very worried about what was going to happen; what lay in our fate.

We were trying to get some sleep despite the anxiety and the uncertainty. But around twelve o'clock, all hell broke loose. The night of March 25 passed and so did the day of March 26, but the firing didn't stop. The flames and smoke became even more vivid at night. Something was moving on the road making a thunderous noise, probably tanks. Bullets had shattered the third floor windows, so our neighbor Husna Banu Khanam and a couple more people gathered in our living room downstairs with their children. A young boy who worked as a house help with one of the third floor families came down sobbing. He had gone close to a window, when a bullet shot right past his ear and the sound of the bullet had deafened him temporarily. Someone tried consoling him, "Don't cry, the ringing will go away soon." Husna Banu told us that in the evening several soldiers entered her house and asked if there were any gold jewelry or watch. But she had already hidden the valuables.

At one point, gunshots were heard very close to our building. I felt deeply saddened to think of the countless people being killed. Through the window, we could see the light of the 'tracer bombs' cutting through the darkness of the night. Nobody could sleep. All of us were sitting hypnotized by the fear of death. There was not a single light in the room, nor any sound, lest they should find out that there were so many of us hiding in there. When Nazma's baby cried out, it was immediately pacified by putting a milk bottle to its mouth. Thus we spent another night in heartstopping terror.

The sun rose again. Strange! Along with the gunfire, we could also hear the sound of [Azaan](#) †, which made me wonder if there were a few people still alive in Dhaka city! But what was this? Someone was banging on our front door from the outside as if they would break it down any moment. As soon as I opened the door, five or six Pakistani soldiers rushed into the room. Their eyes were wild and fierce, their faces sweaty and cruel. It seemed that they were the ones who had been killing people all through the night. All of us sat in the room as we were, only Noman stood up and walked to them like a robot—in case they ask something. One of them, who looked like an officer, came up to him and angrily asked in Urdu, "Did you fire guns from here?"

Noman swiftly answered in Urdu, "No, no. We are teachers. Why would we be firing guns?"

It was a mistake to identify ourselves as teachers. The officer got really enraged and shouted, "Teacher? You are the ones who taught the students how to fire guns?" Then they checked out the rooms with their boots making loud noises on the floor. One of them suddenly asked if we had a gun in the house. My heart trembled. Yesterday Noman had taken apart his hunting rifle and wrapped it in rag clothes before hiding it at the bottom of the storage box. Luckily, they didn't go near that box. But it seemed like they were planning something else. I suddenly noticed that two soldiers were aiming at us and getting ready to fire. I felt my head spinning but I tried to stand up holding the edge of the table. Everyone was sitting there half-dead with terror. Someone was muttering the prayer to escape from danger in Arabic, "La ilaha illa Anta ...". My eldest daughter was hugging all her siblings. As I looked into her terrified eyes, my heart broke. I couldn't move. My limbs felt numb and everything was becoming dark. Suddenly I felt a jerk in my heart. I don't know where I found the courage or the strength in the face of death. I sprinted at the speed of light and grabbed one of the rifles and started screaming like mad, "No! No! Don't shoot! We'll give anything you want!" Noman also moved forward and tried to talk sense into them in Urdu. I didn't notice when or how I had already taken off the gold bangle on my hand and placed it on their gun. The bangle clanged on to the floor and shone brightly. The officer indicated something to the soldiers wielding the guns. They maintained their aim but kept a close eye on us. Were they waiting for orders? At that moment, a Jeep stopped outside. The officer went outside momentarily and returned to say something to the soldiers. I don't know how they got back to their good senses, but this time they lowered their guns and picked up the bangle. I might have gotten some of my sense back too—I scrambled inside and brought back all the jewelry and watches in front of them. The other women in the room also took off the jewelry they were wearing. They tied up all of it in a handkerchief. The officer said, "We had orders to blow up this building and shoot you all. But this time you'll be spared."

They left with a thud. Outside the Jeep started. Everyone inside the room stood up. We looked at each other with sad and terrified eyes, as if silently telling each other that we were not dead! There were tears in everyone's eyes but there was no time to cry. It seemed like the curfew had been lifted as we could hear people talking outside. We had to move from there as soon as possible, else there was no way to escape death. We soon left the place with our children and went to Green Road. We were carrying only a few things with us. Buddha's mom went on her own towards Kamrangirchar, where her son lived. Mahfuz stayed with us. Two nights and a day we had spent amidst the gunfire and killing. Everyone was devastated and weary. We didn't have the strength in our feet, yet we started walking holding our children's hands. On our right, we saw that all the shops on the side of Nilkhet had been demolished in the attack. For a fleeting moment, I thought of the people who must have been sleeping inside the shops on the night of March 25; had any of them survived?

After walking a little, we saw several people on the streets. All of them were walking wearily holding the hands of their children and carrying some belongings on their shoulders. There was not a single rickshaw. One or two private cars were racing past us. As we approached the [New Market's](#) † fresh produce section, we found that it had been burnt to ashes. Oh God, there were some dead bodies in those piles of ashes too! There were also dead bodies lying around on the sidewalk. Some people covered their faces with washcloths. I couldn't even look in that direction and just kept moving forward. When we were near Dhaka College, we found my brother-in-law Mujaddid scurrying towards us. I couldn't hold back my tears when I saw him. My husband spoke up in a desolate voice, "We are completely ruined, my brother." Mujaddid fought hard to hide his tears and grabbed the children's hands. Another private car going past us suddenly stopped and a relative of ours came down from the car to ask us, "Where are you going? Get in the car, quick!" Without a word, we got in and rode to the house in Green Road.

But the Green Road area didn't seem entirely safe either. Army would be out as soon as the curfew resumed. My mother-in-law suggested that we should go to our home in the village. We decided to start for the village immediately. We all tried to eat some snacks, but our throats were so dry that we couldn't swallow anything. We just gulped down a few glasses of water.

A little later, my brother Ibn Mizan came by with his car to check up on us. We packed ourselves in his car and went to Demra. We noticed that even in Demra there were soldiers on patrol keeping a watch over everything. Two of them came towards us. My heart started to pound again. We were in grave danger. They checked two or three of our bags. At last they reached for the wicker basket. It held the baby milk, blankets, and comforters but also the pieces of the gun wrapped in a blanket at the very bottom. They were flipping the blankets one by one. We were holding our breath. There was one more blanket before they would find the gun. Thankfully they didn't flip the last blanket and let us go. We breathed a sigh of relief and quickly gathered our things and moved away.

We saw people rushing to the villages from the city the first chance they got after being stuck in the curfew. With a few belongings and their precious lives in their hands, the people were running away. Their faces bore the signs of terror and fear. When we reached the riverbank in Narsingdi, it was already night time. We had walked some part of the road, the rest we rode on a bus packed with people. We took shelter in a house. We saw a lot of people who had fled from Dhaka and took refuge in the nearby houses. The next morning, we boarded a launch to reach our village - a tiny village by the name of 'Ulukandi' on the banks of the great Meghna river. There was my in-laws' house. The house was deserted till then. But soon the 'refugees' from Dhaka filled it up.

□ *The College of Home Economics* The College of Home Economics was founded by American Ford Foundation and Oklahoma State University, USA and the government of East Pakistan in the year 1961 in Azimpur, Dhaka. The college is the first women's college for Home Economics in Bangladesh. Today, the college is a premiere government institute in the field of home economics and a constituent college of the [University of Dhaka](#) †.

From the Clutches of Death to the War for Freedom

Colonel Imam-Uz-Zaman (Bir Bikram)*

Bogra [Cantonment](#) †, Bogra

Ever since [Sheikh Mujib's](#) † famous speech on [March 7](#) †, 1971, the situation inside the [cantonment](#) † was changing continuously. In light of the non-cooperation movement and the [Mass Uprising](#) †, Pakistani army officers started to get suspicious about us (Bangalis). We could tell, they were looking at us with hatred. They were planning something sinister and they were getting ready for it. Brigade Commander Iqbal Shafi would often have secret meetings with all of the unit commanders. None of the Bangali officers were ever called to these meetings. Inside the cantonment, preparation for 'something' was going on, preparations such as getting out on a short notice, "Stand-to", "Alarm drill", increasing the cantonment security, etc. A few of the Bangali officers sensed what was going to happen, but the conversation was only limited to a few of us. I was only 6 months into the service, a second lieutenant in the 53rd Field Regiment Artillery stationed at Comilla Cantonment. Our regiment was constituted almost entirely of [Punjabi](#) † officers and soldiers. There were only six Bangalis: three officers and three clerks. The other two officers besides me were Captain A.L.A. Zaman and Captain Nurul Islam. As the days passed, the situation became even worse. When ration supply to the cantonment was cut off from the outside, the Pakistanis were enraged. On March 23, when I was on the telephone duty, my unit leader Captain Iftekhar suddenly entered the duty room and showed me a flag, "Look, I snatched it from a truck heading for Dhaka." In great awe, I looked at the flag of my country for the first time. The situation started to get even direr and would eventually culminate on that fateful night.

The morning of the 25th. I went to the office in the morning as usual. But something seemed odd. It seemed as if the whole unit was preparing for something. Everything seemed to be at the final stages of preparation. All the stalled cars were fixed and fueled up, all the Jeeps were equipped and wireless communication was being tested on them. I could not guess exactly what was going to happen when I saw all this. I thought, maybe the army was going through an I.S (internal security) duty.

I returned to the mess at two o'clock after my duty was over. At four o'clock, a runner came with a circular from the office. The order said that there was going to be a night parade and the whole regiment had to be present at five thirty in the afternoon. I caught a ride with Bangali officer, Captain Nurul Islam, from my unit on his motorcycle and reached the unit at the designated time.

We joined the fall-in. Then the night parade started in our respective battery areas. During the evening, different artillery trainings including setting up the cannons took place. Usually the night parade ends at midnight, but it was concluded by 9:30 that night. At ten o'clock, all the officers

of the regiment were to be present in the conference of the commanding officers. We quickly finished dinner to join the conference in the office. We were waiting outside for the Commanding Officer. The commanding Officer came few minutes past ten. He hurriedly entered the office and called us in. Commanding Officer Lt. Colonel Yakub Malik looked at the ground while he spoke:

"Curfew has been declared all over the country. Not only East Pakistan, but West Pakistan as well is under curfew. [Bhutto](#) † and Mujib have been arrested. Now what I want from you is that all of you will go to Comilla town and carry out your duties. Whoever you see outside, shoot them. By morning, I want to see the Comilla town strewn with dead bodies. If you can do that, then by tomorrow noon, the situation in the whole country will become quiet."

Then the Commanding Officer pointed at us, the three Bangali officers, and said, "You East Pakistani officers need not go to Comilla town. I suppose it wouldn't be a pleasant order to follow as East Pakistanis yourselves. I would rather give you some internal responsibilities. For now, go and wait in the office of the quarter-master, I'll give you necessary directions later." At this time, the East Pakistan's permanent officer, a [Bihari](#) † Captain, Sageer Ahmad Siddiqui, raised his hand and asked, "What am I to do, Sir?"

"You can stay with them," said the Commanding Officer.

The conference was over. As we came out of the conference, we noticed that the Pakistani officers were hurrying to get their personal weapons from the armory. Within moments, they left with the trucks full of soldiers that were waiting for them. Only the Commanding Officer stayed behind, with his adjutant and a few clerks, to guard the fort. However, all of them were armed. Following the Commanding Officer's order, the three of us Bangali officers and the Bihari officer Capt. Siddiqui sat in the office of the quarter-master. After a while, Punjabi N.C.O [Naik](#) † Afzal suddenly came and locked us in the room from the outside. We grew suspicious. We discussed among ourselves, "Are we being arrested?" Capt. Zaman and Capt. Siddiqui said, "The soldiers are excited. By keeping us locked, the Commanding Officer is probably making sure that we are safe."

Captain Nurul Islam and I were discussing our next moves between ourselves in a hushed voice. We didn't really trust Capt. Zaman as he was pro-Pakistan. At midnight, the lights went out. A few moments of silence followed. Then we heard two gunshots about three hundred yards from us. Captain Nurul Islam whispered in my ears, "They must be killing Bangalis." We could not know for certain what was happening then.

The regimental control radio set was in the room right behind ours. We could hear the radio operator clearly from this room. We could clearly hear the conversations going on with different subunits in parts of the city. At one stage we heard the operator asking- "Have you arrested Delta Charlie and Sierra Papa?" (*These are code names for the [Deputy Commissioner](#) † and the Superintendent of Police - Editor*)

The answer was, "No, they've escaped."

The operator said, "Imam's (*a codename for probably the Commanding Officer of the mission - Editor*) orders are to capture them and bring them back to the cantonment by the break of dawn."

The other side replied, "OK."

Hearing this we got even more suspicious. I asked Captain Nurul Islam, "Why do they want to arrest the D.C. (Deputy Commissioner) and the S.P. (Superintendent of Police)?" Nothing was clear to us. We couldn't figure out which way the situation was heading or what we should do. We spent the night dozing on and off in the dark, sitting on the chairs. At the break of dawn we saw, through the glass door, the Mercedes Benz of Comilla's D.C. and the Jeep of the S.P. were brought in the cantonment with an army Jeep cordon. In the open Jeep at the front Captain Bokhari was standing with a Chinese sub-machine gun in his hand. These two civilian officers were locked up in the corner room of our office building.

The morning of the 26th. The situation looked quite normal. Around 7 o'clock, the Commanding Officer opened our door. He ordered Captain Zaman to help Captain Ifekhar disarm the Bangali policemen at the Police Lines. Captain Zaman immediately left us. Then came Adjutant Captain Ausaf Ahmed. He told us to stay in that room until further orders. Arrangements were made to bring our beds and personal belongings into the room. We would have to ask the guard even if we wanted to go to the toilet; only then the guard would open the door, such were his orders. Within an hour, three bunks were brought in. The office table of the quartermaster was pushed next to the window to set up three beds along the wall. Our personal clothes and shaving kits were brought in from the mess. We freshened up and tried to habituate ourselves with the situation. Around 8.30 a.m., the Punjabi mess waiter brought us breakfast. We spent the whole day in captivity. The afternoon was almost gone when I saw through the glass door that Capt. Bokhari had returned with a truck full of arrested civilians. No sooner had the truck stopped then the soldiers jumped on them. They dragged the captives off the truck and started beating them mercilessly. The soldiers were screaming in Urdu, " *Ye sab Jasus hay...* They are all spies."

The Commanding Officer came to the spot and ordered, "Beat them to death!"

The massacre continued on two or three more trucks full of people. Slowly the darkness of the night covered the world while we still remained captive in that small room. After dinner we thought of trying to get some sleep. But the sentry notified us that we have to keep the light on in the room. We figured, they were trying to make sure that we would not escape in the dark. Because with the lights on, we could be clearly seen through the glass.

The next day was March 27. In the morning everything looked pretty normal again. We spent the day observing the same heartbreaking scene of the brutal beatings and the deaths of Bangalis captured from the town. The next two days went by the same way. On March 29 around 4 p.m., we heard an earthshattering sound of explosion from the back of our building. We heard that terrible sound repeatedly. Curious to know what was going on, we looked out the rear window to see what was going on. We saw that a few cannons were being fired on Comilla town from the Mechanical Transport Park. A few light automatic guns were also being fired in every direction. We realized without a doubt that they had started to kill all the Bangali soldiers. As I saw through the window, the cannons were aimed at the Kotbari and the 4th East Bengal Line. The cannon fire and light gunfire continued. Along with the cannons I could hear the Chinese S.M.Gs, L.M.Gs, H.M.Gs and rifles firing rapidly. Before the firing started, through the window, I had seen a few Bangali soldiers playing volleyball on the E.M.E workshop field. That very moment, a platoon of Punjabi soldiers led by Brigade Major Sultan unexpectedly attacked them and killed them on the playing fields. One or two that escaped were chased after. Through the front door, I saw the Punjabi soldiers gather all the Bangali soldiers from different units with their hands up. Random gun fire was still going on.

Around half past four, the Commanding Officer Lt. Colonel Yakub Malik ordered a sentry to open the door of the room we were held in and spoke to us, "Don't worry. Rest assured. There are no charges against you. We are just following government orders. You can relax and rest." We could still hear sporadic gunfire, but it seemed to be slowing down.

At half past eight that night, they gave us dinner and locked us up again. Worried to death, I could not sleep. I was quite sure that we would be killed any moment. On the other hand I was thinking, since we were still alive, maybe we had survived this ordeal. The night passed amid such

confusion and stress.

Tuesday, March 30. Everything seemed normal. Breakfast was served on time. The Battery Havildar Major stopped by once to ask whether I need anything. My personal batman (servant) also stopped by to ask about my well-being. Captain Siddiqui requested permission to go home to see his wife. His request was rejected. Time was passing quietly. Nothing out of the ordinary happened. Lunch was served and it tasted good, but the Punjabi waiter treated us rather rudely. His face clearly showed the signs of hatred.

After lunch we were lying down for a little rest. As per order, we were always in our uniforms. But since no officers were visiting us, we had taken off our shoes, caps, and belts. Comilla's D.C. and S.P. were held captive in the room at the end of the building and the room next to ours contained the three clerks from our unit.

At exactly four o'clock, we were startled at the sound of cannon fire all around us. Light firearms were also being fired non-stop. We couldn't really figure out what was happening. Captain Siddiqui commented, "It must be the 4th East Bengal from Brahmanbaria attacking the cantonment." As we were watching from the window, everyone was firing haphazardly. We even saw the office guards take positions. We saw the Adjutant Captain Ausaf Ahmed sprinting towards the Officer's Mess across the office building with a group of soldiers. Within a few minutes he came back with the soldiers. About ten minutes later, he ran past the locked door of our room towards the room where the D.C. and the S.P. were being held captive with a pistol in his hand. Almost immediately we heard two gunshots from the room. Captain Nurul Islam spoke to me, "They just killed the D.C. and the S.P." We clearly understood that the adjutant was the one who killed them.

A few moments later Captain Nurul Islam shouted, "Imam, look, Kashem is pointing his rifle at us!"

As we looked through the back window, we saw that [Sepoy](#)† Clerk Kashem was pointing his rifle at our window from behind a sandbag and the Regimental Havildar Major was giving him instructions directing his fingers toward us. I immediately told the other two officers that if anyone would come to kill us, we should make a plan where we were going to take positions in the room. Before anyone could say a word, I added, "I am going to stand next to the door with my back against the wall."

As soon as I finished speaking, we saw [Subedar](#)† Faiz Sultan, senior JCO of the Headquarter Battery, in full combat uniform standing before the locked door of our room. His face was emanating hatred with a ghoulish ferocity. He broke the glass door and pushed the muzzle of his gun through the hole in a firing position to shoot us. Before he could fire I leaned against the wall next to the door as pre-planned. I anticipated that the Subedar wouldn't be able to turn his muzzle 180° to shoot at me.

Captain Nurul Islam in a last attempt to save his life, tried to say something at the hateful face of the Subedar, "Sub..."

But before he could complete a word, eight to ten bullets pierced his chest. When the bullets hissed past me as the gun was fired, it felt as if someone was pushing me downward with great force. Captain Nurul Islam folded his hand and fell flat on the ground.

You could see the blood flowing from his mouth. Within seconds, he passed away. Captain Siddiqui was shot down in a similar fashion. Since it was not possible to shoot at me from his position, the Subedar probably went to get the keys to open the door. As a last resort to live, I hid under my bed. I pulled the bed cover all the way down to the floor so I could not be seen from the sides. The Subedar returned shortly, I heard him unlock the door. I covered my head and ears with my hands. When he walked up near to me, I screamed as loud as I could. The Subedar came up to the bed and without wasting a moment fired his S.M.G. As I heard the gunfire I kept screaming. When he fired the second round, I stopped screaming and drew a long breath and went quiet and still. I did this intentionally. I still had my senses. I felt a good number of bullets hit me but I wasn't dead yet. However, the Subedar thought that I was dead and left me there. I carefully raised both hands. A bullet had hit my right wrist. Another had hit my right eye and it was bleeding severely. I couldn't see with my right eye. The third bullet had gone through my shirt grazing my back. I saw at least half a dozen bullet holes on the floor that must have missed me by only a few inches. Shattered pieces of the concrete floor had flown off and hit my face. As I looked up I saw many holes on the mattress from the bullets shot at me.

Only a few moments had passed when I heard the sound of army boots coming towards this room. I decided to play dead. I exposed my wounds clearly for display, then smeared some blood from the puddle on the floor over my eyes and forehead. I then closed my eyes, held my breath and laid down like a stiff corpse. I recognized the voice, the adjutant had brought along Sepoy Akbar. They went to the other two dead bodies. The adjutant ordered the sepoy, "*Check koro in logoko... Check if they are dead.*"

Akbar replied, "*Dono khatam ho gaya... Both are finished.*"

Then the adjutant came next to my bed and ordered, "*Charpaya hotaho ... Move the bed.*" Akbar picked up the bed and moved it aside. I felt the adjutant lean over me to have a closer look. He ordered, "*Ei, iska upor charpaya rakh do ... Put the bed back over this one.*"

When he was speaking, I could feel his hot breath on my skin. He probably ordered to put the bed back so that he wouldn't have to see my horrible looking corpse. Once they confirmed all of us were dead, they left the room. I relaxed and breathed a sigh of relief. I was under the bed, and with the bed cover drawn all the way to the floor, I couldn't be seen from the outside. But I had no idea what to do, so I just lay there.

A few minutes later, I heard someone coming towards the room. Immediately I became a 'corpse' again. The stranger came close and asked, "*Colonel Yakub ne ye dekha hay... Has Colonel Yakub seen this?*"

I recognized the voice as Brigade Major Sultan's. He came close to me, picked up the bed cover and threw it back down. "*Bas, sare Bangali khatam ho gaya... Good, all the Bangalis are finished,*" I heard him say as he left.

I was able to relax once more. Approximately twenty minutes later someone else entered the room. I couldn't recognize him. He searched all the cupboards and drawers, making a harsh noise in the process. Then he kicked the dead bodies of Captain Nurul Islam and Captain Siddiqui before walking out.

Around six o'clock, when it was getting dark outside, a few soldiers stopped by the door to see our corpses. But they were not allowed to enter the room. I heard their conversation. My Battery's Havildar Major asked, "*Imam Saab kitthe ... Where is Captain Imam?*"

Someone replied, "*Charpaya ki thalley... Under the bed.*" At this point, the adjutant came by and shouted at them to leave the place. He then ordered the guard not to let anyone look at the bodies from outside. The guard replied that anyone could see the dead bodies through the glass, how was he supposed to stop them. The adjutant then ordered him to close the door and cover the glass with paper. Within moments I heard the door close, followed by the rustling sound of paper being glued to the door. I raised a corner of the bed sheet to see the silhouette of the sentry by the door and figured they had used the white copy paper from the office to cover the window. The light was turned off, so the room was dark. There were sentries guarding the front door and the back window.

I thought about what to do. I was afraid that when they would come to remove the dead bodies they would find me alive. So I decided that I had to escape. I had Allah in my mind and kept reciting Surahs from the Quran. I raised my hands to Allah and prayed to Him to save my life. By that time, I was determined to live. Around half past ten, I heard the doors opening in the room next to ours. I heard chairs and tables being moved

around and something heavy being moved out. I figured that they were moving the bodies of the three clerks who were held captive in that room. Next they would come to our room. I shivered, but luckily nobody came. Time was passing by and random gunshots could be heard outside. I tilted my head a little to see Captain Nurul Islam's body lying straight and stiff. The pungent smell of stale blood was all around me. My right wrist was still bleeding. I couldn't see anything with my right eye and the left eye seemed to be getting worse as well. Surprisingly, even then I didn't feel weak. On the contrary, I was feeling stronger as my determination to survive increased.

I decided that I must make a plan to escape. There was only one escape route, the back window. It didn't have any grill on it and could be opened from the inside. But I still had to go past a guard positioned outside the window. So I planned to creep up to the window, and jump out as soon as I opened the window. I would then run past the guard and zigzag my way across the field as fast as I could. Even if I hit any obstacle, I would find a way through. There was great risk in that plan. But if I stayed, death was imminent. When there was a slim chance of surviving, why not take it?

A long time passed while I made my plans. There was no sign of any attempt to move our bodies yet. Around midnight, I finally decided to escape. But I couldn't sum up the courage to stand up. I tried to get up, but the weakness in my body had sapped my energy and courage. Every time I tried to stand up, I fell down. I was afraid, if I were too late they would come back to move the bodies and find me alive. So, I tried to stand up very slowly. I was wearing my uniform and shoes. I was being very careful so that there was no sound from my boot pin. First I crawled out from under the bed silently. Then I pushed myself up on my knees very slowly. I was doing all these very carefully to not make a sound. It took me nearly 15 minutes to get myself out from under the bed and stand up on my knees.

I crawled on my knees very slowly to the office table which had been moved closer the window to make room for the beds. Very carefully I climbed up on the table. I reached out to grab the handle and started opening the window. But then it got stuck somewhere. Submitting my fate to the mercy of God, I recited a few Surahs again and then whispered "*Allahu Akbar...* God is great!" and yanked the window open with full force. The next moment, I jumped out the window. I dropped on the ground close to the wall and saw a guard standing just a few yards from me. Without looking left or right, I gathered all my energy and started to sprint. The sentry guard yelled out. I had not run 25 yards when he fired the first round of bullets. I was running downslope—I stumbled and fell on my face. I hurt my face, elbow, and knees and tore my clothes. But I jumped up immediately and kept running in my pre-planned direction. The guard kept shooting at me but soon his Chinese rifle was out of bullets. Upon hearing his gunshots, all the other guards started firing their light firearms in random directions as well and soon there was gunfire all around the cantonment.

I kept on running. The speed I was running at then - I could never run that fast now. It was as if my strength had doubled at that moment. As I ran with all my might, I crossed the football field behind the Battery office. Suddenly I realized that I had run along the main road and reached the gate of the workshop. As soon as I realized that, I got off the main road and started running towards the slope of the hill on the north side. My intention was to hide myself under the trees and shrubs on the hill and to run north-east to cross Comilla-Brahmanbaria road. Shots were still being fired. I got tired after a while and resorted to walking. At that moment, I heard some boots behind me. I increased my pace. The soldiers were still far behind me, so I went a little further and threw my shirt away after taking out my wallet and identity card and tucking those in the back pocket of my trousers. I was wearing only a white undershirt. Thinking it might give away my location in the dark, I took that one off too and kept moving ahead shirtless.

At one point, I reached the Brahmanbaria road. Now my main challenge was to cross the road. There was a huge searchlight flooding the area from the main gate of the Combined Military Hospital. The road was brightly lit. Seeing no other way, I crawled (like we used to do during night patrols) to the side of the road. After checking left and right, I ran across the open area. Once on the other side, I started to crawl again and reached the huts in Tipra Bazaar. All the huts in the bazaar were deserted. I wanted to escape from the cantonment area. But a security perimeter had been set up all around the cantonment. I could hear the firing from the trenches and bunkers in front of me and could see the gun flashes in the dark. Once again, I lost all courage. It seemed impossible to pass that perimeter. There was a pond right next to me. I rolled down and hid myself in one corner of the pond. Losing all my spirit, I lay in the mud. Time was quickly passing by. Aimless bullets were flying everywhere. I thought, if I just lay there, I would be caught first thing in the morning. After about twenty minutes, I regained my lost spirit and energy and started moving forward again. As I crawled forward, the light from the petrol pump and the check post helped me identify which way was north-east. The paddy fields were ready for harvest. Some places were muddy and full of water. The crops had grown quite tall by then. As I was moving along the ridges of the fields, I was hidden among the crop. It would have been quite difficult to spot me. Besides, I was moving almost silently. But I kept checking behind as I moved forward. Once I saw a Dodge car standing by the side of the road and pointing its strong headlight at the paddy fields. Immediately I sank to the ground and started to crawl on my elbows. When I got tired from crawling I would stop to rest for a while before moving on. At one point, I felt that a lot of mud had infected the wound on my right wrist. I cupped up some water from the paddy field to clean the wound and bandaged it with my handkerchief. With great patience, I kept moving forward without looking left or right. After a while, I felt the gunfire from the automatic weapons was coming from behind me. That meant I had crossed the security perimeter.

Out of excitement and enthusiasm, I stood up and started running but suddenly fell into a hole. Getting up, I started running again. But suddenly I realized that machine gun rounds that were coming from my back were whistling past me and hitting the bamboo grove on my right. Running like this didn't seem safe. So I hit the ground and started crawling again. I tried to lift my left arm to look at the time on my watch. It was too dark to see anything. Besides, my right eye was still bleeding heavily. Through all that gunfire, I reached the dam on the river Gomti. I crossed the dam without any resistance and breathed a sigh of relief thinking I was at a distance safe enough from the enemies firing range. However, the enemy position was actually only 400 yards behind me. I walked through the sugarcane fields by the river to reach its bank. But I got worried when I saw how wide the river was and doubted whether I would be able to cross it. Once I thought maybe I should walk along the bank to meet up with the 4th [East Bengal Regiment](#) † in Brahmanbaria. The next moment I thought, if I stayed on this side of the river, the Pakistanis would hunt me down by the morning. My plan was to go north-east and reach the nearest Indian border. So once again I decided that I must cross the river. I picked a spot where the river was comparatively narrower. Although a little doubtful, I gathered all my courage and went down to the water wearing my pants and boots. Almost unconscious, I kept on swimming. After a few minutes, I felt the ground under my feet, meaning I had reached the other side. Breathing a sigh of relief, I walked up to the embankment. I crossed the embankment to step into a free area. This side of the river was outside the control of the Pakistan army. I generously thanked Allah, the most Merciful, for giving me a new life.

I was walking through marshes and paddy fields. I reached a village around four in the morning. Later I came to know that the village was Bharasar, under Burichong Thana. I sat on the edge of a pond till day broke. At dawn, a group of young men from the village surrounded me. Before I could tell them my story, they spoke, "We heard that the Pakistanis killed a lot of Bangali soldiers in the cantonment yesterday and the

day before. Are you one of the few survivors?"

The villagers swiftly took me to a house in the village. My wounds were washed and I was given clothes to wear. I was fed and then taken to the Burichong dispensary on a rickshaw and provided medical treatment locally. Abdul Hamid, a dedicated member of the volunteer corps took very good care of me. I was in that village till April 4. Local political leaders advised me to go to India. They informed me that India was helping us greatly in the Liberation War.

That same afternoon, per their advice, I started for India with a few political leaders. We reached India through the Motinagar B.S.F. check post. There I met Brigadier Khaled Mosharraf. He had led the 4th East Bengal Regiment in a revolt in Brahmanbaria. On that day, he was planning to lead an attack in Comilla. Brigadier Khaled took me to the G.B. Hospital in Agartala and I was admitted there.

On April 11, Major A.T.M. Haider brought me to Sonamura (Tripura, India). There, I was given the command of a regular company. Brigadier Khaled gave me a map and explained the details of the plan to ambush the Pakistan Army on the ComillaChandpur Road. My wound had not yet been healed completely. But despite that, I started with my company that same night. We crossed the border and reached our location near Lalmai the next afternoon.

From there, I started another chapter of my adventures against the barbarous Pakistan army. From the clutches of certain death, I had entered the war for freedom.

□ The narrator retired from Bangladesh Army as Major General. He was awarded the Gallantry Award 'Bir Bikram' for his bravery in the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971. He also served as the Chairman of the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) after his retirement from the army.

Those Suffocating Days

Selina Hossain

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[Present - Retired as the Director of Bangla Academy, and
continues to write]*

I used to live in the 'Maneesha' building of the Science Laboratory* back then, with Mirpur Road on one side and Elephant Road on the other. I could hear slogans from the streets till 11 p.m. on [March 25](#) †. Around midnight, I opened the front doors and went outside. There was a commotion all around and heavy vehicles were moving on the streets. Suddenly I was startled by a loud noise from somewhere nearby and got back inside the house. The next day, [March 26](#) †, I kept moving to and fro between the balcony and the roof all day. There was a curfew and we could not go outside. Dhaka was burning; I could see black smoke rising to the sky. I was desperate to go outside. It was hard to guess what was going on out there, or to fathom the importance of the events that were transpiring. I was particularly eager to know what was going on at [Iqbal Hall](#) †. Iqbal Hall had become the center of the non-cooperation movement in March 1971, particularly during the last twenty-five days of the movement. I was agitated all day.

I went out as soon as the curfew was withdrawn on the 27th. The first thing that I noticed was that the house of A. R. Bhuiyan near the Science Laboratory had been blown away. The empty house was just rubble now. The furniture and other stuff were all over the place. I shivered as I began to realize the severity of what was happening and felt a deep sense of emptiness coming over me as I left the ruins.

As I reached Elephant Road, I saw people fleeing. With their belongings and families, everyone was running for some safe haven. They did not know where they were going, or whether they would ever reach a safe zone. I walked with the crowd. Even as I saw the people running frantically, I didn't think for a moment that I would leave Dhaka. The only thought on my mind right then was to go see what was going on at Iqbal Hall. I had moved permanently to Dhaka at the end of '68. The [Mass Uprising of '69](#) † had begun by then. The heart of the city was furious with the people's rage. The daily processions excited me. The result of my M.A. exams had just been published and I was applying for jobs. I had been politically involved in my student life as a member of the [Students' Union](#) †. My soul had found its calling in this city of processions. If I left, where would I go? I could have gone to the village, but I didn't. And I didn't think of going across the border. During the days of our Liberation War, I experienced Dhaka in its actuality with my own eyes. I thought whatever happened, I should be here. If there is anything I can do, I'll do it right from here. I had joined Bangla Academy in July of 1970. There, I would meet authors and artists and hear all the news around the country.

There were a few cars and rickshaws in the streets. As I neared the grocery section of [New Market](#) †, I saw the demolished bazaar. A vegetable seller laid face-down on his vegetable baskets with a bullet through his back. He hadn't rolled off after his death—his body remained in the sitting position in which he had died. Several other dead bodies were lying around him—some with their faces down, some up. I felt as if someone was squeezing my heart, I couldn't breathe.

I came to Iqbal Hall by a rickshaw. During the Uprising of 1969, the students changed its name to Sergeant Zahurul Haq Hall. During the movement, Sergeant Zahurul Haq, an accused in the [Agartala Conspiracy Case](#) †, was shot dead by the Pakistan Army. On my way, I saw the Babutala slums burned to the ground, nothing left but dust and ashes. And I found Iqbal Hall in ruins as well, in a heap of bricks and stones, with dried dark blood stains on the staircases. I climbed the stairs avoiding the blood as much as I could. Everything was dead quiet. Every single room had been ransacked, windows were broken, beds and pillows had been thrown around, books were scattered. In a room, a copy of the Quran was on its stand and in another, a wooden rifle was on the floor. At the end of the corridor was the room numbered 303, the door read "Jafar, Chittagong". There was dried blood on the floor of the room. But there were no corpses. I could see that the dead bodies had been dragged through the corridor and the stairs. A lot of the rooms were like that. Later, I learned from the descriptions of [dolls](#) † how eleven dead bodies were burned with petrol by the side of the large pond in Iqbal Hall. I stood holding the door of that room for a while, and saw that a little away from the blood lay a plastic doll on the floor. Who knew whom the student had bought that doll for?

Crossing the corridor, I went to the roof. There were three more dead bodies near the water tank - a middle aged man, a boy of 9 or 10

years, and a girl. The boy lay with his head on the right arm of the man, his chest shattered with bullet wounds. There was a large wound on the man's thigh. You could see the muscles around it were shredded to mere threads. He was staring with his eyes wide open and with the most dreadful expression in them. The girl was shot in the abdomen, her intestines had come out. Large blue flies flew around them. The bodies smelled from the rot. Stunned and unable to move, I stood there for a while. I thought, this is my country where people's flesh is torn apart like flower petals.

I don't know how I had managed to come down the stairs step by step and then to the gate. I was standing on the streets for a rickshaw as I didn't have it in me to take another step. That's when a Jeep stopped in front of me. [Shahidullah Kaiser](#) † was in that Jeep with several reporters. He sort of scolded me by saying, "Who comes out in this situation? Go home now!" Without waiting for an answer, his Jeep left us. I never got the chance to meet him in a liberated Bangladesh.

I took a rickshaw to the [Shaheed Minar](#) †. My eyes swelled with tears. It felt as if the heavy weight on my heart was finally lifting. I was breathing hard. It wasn't just the people they had targeted—our inspirations, the monuments that gave us strength and hope had also been targeted. They understood where we drew courage from, what drove us; that's why they destroyed the Shaheed Minar as well. I went to Bangla Academy. The front portions had been blasted away with mortar strikes. On February 2 that year, [Bangabandhu](#) † [Sheikh Mujibur Rahman](#) † had come to this institute and gave a speech as part of the Language Day † ([February 21](#) †) celebrations. Hence, the Pak Army knew that the brick walls of this institute were no inanimate objects, every inch of its soil and grass was alive! If this place were blown away, perhaps the spirit of the Bangalis would be crushed too! Lorries carrying the military passed us on the streets. And I felt kind of desolate. I returned home around noon, and lay quietly on my bed.

The days moved on. We kept getting bad news from all around us. We heard that my father's home in Rajshahi had been attacked by [Biharis](#) † and everything was looted. Luckily, my parents and younger siblings had fled towards the villages before that. My second sister came from Chittagong to live with us with her two children. They used to live near the port of Chittagong since my brother-in-law was working as the Deputy Controller of Seacustoms. They had managed to escape under heavy gunfire. My eldest sister was a teacher at the Port's Girls' School. They had fled to the villages in Noakhali.

Young men and boys were captured or kidnapped, blindfolded, and taken to the rivers by the army. Then their dead bodies were found floating in the Buriganga River. The only consolation among all this chaos was listening to [Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra](#) †. The days had changed dramatically from the moment the Declaration of Independence was transmitted over radio by [Ziaur Rahman](#) † on behalf of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. There were inspiring programs and songs on the radio.

I began going to work again. One day, (late) Mr. Humayun Kabir contacted me. He asked for donations and old clothes for the [Mukti Bahini](#) †. He also said that these should be collected on a regular basis. I signed up and helped as much as I could. Humayun Kabir was a research fellow at Bangla Academy. He used to visit there quite often and provided us with news regularly. One day, Sardar Fazlul Karim was arrested right in front of our eyes by intelligence officers in plain clothes. Another evening a lawyer who lived in our neighborhood was left dead by the freedom fighters.

Mukti Bahini was gaining momentum in the city. Their operations were becoming more frequent. If we didn't hear the explosions, we would feel nervous. We lived and died with their raids and operations. The guerilla operations around the city revived our hopes and gave us courage.

The city had been divided into two groups of people. One group moved around freely and boldly. They were armed—they could do anything they wished. From the night of March 25, that was what they had been doing. They had their accomplices. The lackeys obeyed them to the letter, helped them in any way possible.

And then there was the other group who moved about gingerly, fearing for their lives with every step they took. The streets would be deserted by the late afternoon as they waited eagerly for the Mukti Bahini. It was as if this city had no normal life, everything was deserted. Who could remember that Dhaka had been bustling with activity at 10 p.m. even on March 25? It was as if the Bay of Bengal had suddenly risen, and swept through the city.

I was on a rickshaw in Elephant Road when the Indian air planes flew over the city around noon on December 4. This time people rushed outside when they heard the planes—they were not scared, they rejoiced.

On [December 14](#) †, I saw the red EPRC ((East Pakistan Roads and Transport Corporation) coach enter the Science Laboratory premises from the balcony of the 'Maneesha' building. The [Al-Badr](#) † captured Dr. Aminuddin and Dr. Siddique.

A few days after the country was liberated, I met [Sufia Kamal](#) †. She embraced me and exclaimed, "You are alive?"

She had confused me with Shaheed [Selina Pervin](#) †, because Md. Akhter of 'Lolona' (weekly women's magazine) was murdered at the hands of the Al-Badr. He was in charge of 'Lolona' and inspired me to write the 'Sangbarta' column there.

That night, I wasn't surprised at Sufia Kamal's question. Because everyone had been counting the moments to an unpredictable death ever since March 25, even more so since the [Boddho-bhumi](#) † (killing grounds) areas at Katasur and Shiyalbari had been discovered.

With those suffocating days finally over, I breathed in relief and uttered, "Yes! I am still alive."

□ *Science Laboratory* Bangladesh Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (BCSIR). The author refers to the living quarters of the scientists.

In the Hills and Jungles

Tapan Chakraborty

Science Writer, Deputy Director, [Bangla Academy](#) †, Dhaka

Our home is at Sukchari, in Chittagong district. Our village is located about two miles east of the [Grand Trunk Road](#) †. In 1971, our relatives who lived near the road took refuge with relatives who lived away from it, since military Jeeps were frequently patrolling the highway. The Indian radio used to broadcast the news of how many people the Pakistani Army had killed and where, how many houses they had burned down, etc. There were about twenty-five to thirty people seeking shelter at our house. We needed to arrange for their food and bedding. My parents were old. Everything fell on the shoulders of my newly married wife – Molina. When I managed to escape from Chittagong and reached my village home, my relatives were relieved, yet they seemed alarmed. My father was the most worried about me. They heard that my name was on the top of a list of people to be captured and killed.

So I had to flee again. I went to my father-in-law's place in Banskhali. That is when the news of the militia attack in our area reached me. They killed many, and looted a lot. They brought down the 'Joy Bangla' † flag and hoisted the Pakistani flag. They mainly attacked the Hindu community, but also destroyed the houses of [Muslim Awami Leaguers](#) †. People took shelter in the hills. Some religious leaders from the Muslim community declared that all the houses, properties, and even the women of the Hindu community were 'Gonimoter maal', war booty. It would not be a sin if the victors enjoyed them!

I was dumbstruck by this piece of information. I tried to get some news about my parents; but failed. It was extremely dangerous to go back. However, my defiant and headstrong father-in-law Pran Kumar Bhattacharya declared that night, "We need to start for Sukchari tomorrow. You'll go with me." This was around the end of April.

My father-in-law was about twenty years older than me. But I couldn't keep pace with him in either walking or talking. We were so engrossed in our conversation that I didn't even realize we had travelled nearly eighteen miles. When we reached the village, we met Mr. Mohammad Hossain near the entrance. His eyes filled with tears when he saw us. He did 'Kodombussi' (touched feet to show respect) to my father-in-law and then hugged me. Then suddenly he was very self-conscious—someone might have seen him with us! Hossain was my father-in-law's student and also my elder brother's class-mate. He rushed us, "Go to your neighborhood. You'll get to know everything. Don't stand here for long. The cattle thieves and robbers have destroyed the village in unison." He told my father-in-law, "Sir, I'll see you at night," and took off in a hurry.

When we entered the village, we realized that the condition was way more heartbreaking than what he had heard. The whole village had become a huge graveyard. Even the leaves of the trees were burnt and discolored. There was not even a dog anywhere. It was nearing dusk. There was no sound. Our neighborhood was in an even worse condition. Only one house had survived the fire, actually it had been deliberately spared. Later, I came to know the reason. There was a person with a bullet in his leg lying inside, Mr. Das. He burst into tears when he saw me. The room reeked of rotten flesh. The wound was very deep. It looked like thick mud, flies flying around it. He had no energy to move.

We learned from him that eleven people were killed in that neighborhood. We started for our house and found my disabled elder sister, standing like a ghost in the premises of our burnt house. She said, "Come around using the back yard".

I asked, "Why?"

She replied, "They have buried all the corpses together, right there."

My father-in-law lit the flashlight to get a better look. I asked my sister, "Why does the soil look so cracked?" She replied, "Some of them were still alive when being buried. Maybe they were trying to kick out of the ground." My sister told us that my father, Molina, elder brother, three nephews, and some others of the household took shelter in the hills; so they were still alive. Perhaps, they were going towards the Indian-Burmese* border. The latest news from Rasha Bazaar was that the hill-robbers had looted all of their belongings on the way.

We fled from the village to take shelter at another village to the east, deep in the hills. I didn't have much money with me. Next day, I sold my Favre Leuba wristwatch for 55 taka and started for Ruma Bazaar, located upstream of the River Shankha. My father-in-law embraced me before I left—his eyes were filled with tears. People said that no one had ever seen him become emotional. Who knew that would be my last meeting with him!

I crossed hill after hill, cascade after cascade, and forest after forest. I kept on walking till I reached my destination. I was famished. Water from the cascades was the only thing that sustained me. Many elderly people, children, and women had walked this dreadful path for the sake of their lives. I was just one more. I spent two nights under the shelter of the hill tribes. When I finally reached Ruma Bazaar, my legs were bleeding and swollen.

I could not find any of my relatives in Ruma Bazaar. I heard they had gone ahead further. There was no way to proceed without a guide. The price of a guide had also skyrocketed. The tribesmen of the hills were the only guides and luggage bearers. The news of people fleeing this way had already reached the town. So everybody feared that there might be military speedboats coming up the River Shankha anytime. Rumors were, a [Peace Committee](#) † would be formed within a day or two. Death was inevitable, if I could not leave Ruma soon.

I limped along and almost dragged my tired body to the school building beside the bazaar. There were some refugees waiting in the school building. I pulled two benches together, lay there, and fell asleep almost immediately. Suddenly I realized somebody was shaking my legs and yelling, "Professor, run away." I also heard the sound of people fleeing, children crying, women wailing. And then I heard the dreadful sound of engines coming up the river. Everybody realized that the Pakistani soldiers were coming. People were running like mad men. I too started running through the hills and jungles.

For about an hour, I sat on a stone by a stream in the valley of two hills deep in the forest. Five or six other people were with me. The Peace Committee captured us that same night. I was afraid that they were going to kill us. They didn't. Rather, I got a shelter. I couldn't sleep for fear of my life and my family's lives. Right before dawn, I went out telling them that I would go to the side of the River Shankha.

Next morning, I stood in the queue in the outpost of Ruma Bazaar. The Peace Committee had created that outpost. They had decided at night that nobody could leave with gold or any other valuables in their possessions. Refugees were to pay a tax of Tk.50 per head. The demand was not very high. But how could I pay even that? I had only twenty taka in my pocket. One of my father's students had a business in the Bazaar. I begged him for help. He lent me Tk.300. There were many people in the line, each one trying to go first. I somehow bent my body, tucked a 100 Taka note instead of 50 Taka to a member of the Peace Committee, and snuck out like a worm. I just sprinted for about a mile without looking back. Now, I could start thinking about something else.

And that was the thought of food. The refugee families had utensils, rice, and lentils with them. They cooked and ate beside the stream. I did have a bag with me, but it was empty other than a pen, some paper, and a set of [lungi](#) † and [panjabi](#) †. Having no other alternatives, I kept on walking without food. On the way, I felt pity for a woman. She was pregnant and limping along while carrying a two year old. I asked, "Where are your companions?" She replied, "They've moved along. Those cruel people! They left the baby with me." I didn't know the woman; neither did

she know me. I took the child on my back and started walking again. I could feel that I was growing tired going up and down the hills. Moreover, I was starving and almost dying from thirst. At some point, I couldn't help but sit beside a hill. The woman gave me a little bit of dried rice and about a quarter glass of water. Then we started walking again. Finally, we caught up with her husband. I asked, "How could you leave your wife like that?" He replied, "[Dada](#) †, my strength failed me." Anyway, the responsibility of carrying the child remained upon me. I came to know that they were like my relatives—he was the son of my father's friend. That was the first time I had met his wife. Every day I would get some food twice as a compensation for carrying their child; so I was temporarily relieved of the worry for food. But when we reached the flat land after the hills, they no longer called me to share their food. I realized I had lost my job as the child-carrier.

Being unemployed, I starved for a day, except for the bountiful young bamboo leaves. And of course, there was the clear fresh water from the stream. Deep in the night, the rain startled me awake. It was a strong storm with rains. I was completely drenched and sat there clumsily. With no sound of another human being nearby, I fell asleep at some point.

I was very surprised in the morning—all the refugees had left without me. Which way should I go? I didn't feel safe to go forward without having a clue. So I decided to wait. I chewed on bamboo leaves and drank the water from the stream. In the afternoon I finally found someone: my acquaintance Dr. Manik's son. He got first class in I.Sc* after I had tutored him. He said, "Sir, you are alone, stay with us."

I asked, "Where are your parents?"

He replied, "Father is sleeping beside the spring and mother has fallen behind. It is difficult for her to walk as she is rather obese."

I was thinking to myself, "Perhaps I am going to get yet another temporary job." And my hope was realized. Manik was relieved to hand over the responsibilities of his wife to me. I happily agreed to take up the responsibility for the prospect of some food. My job was to pull the lady up the hill and then guide her down to the valley. A very humanitarian job indeed. The problem was—Dr. Manik continued to share my cigarettes. He said, "Brother, I could not bring any money with me. I don't have any money to buy cigarettes." I believed him. The cigarettes of Tk.2 were being sold at Tk.16 in the hills. The money in my pocket was vanishing pretty quickly too.

After crossing the Raikkhang Dharendra-karbari area, we reached the first Indian camp at 7 p.m. We got shelter in an empty room on the second floor of a Chakma* house. The food was simple "Khichuri" made from rice and lentil but it tasted heavenly! I got the news that my close ones were in the Daamdev refugee camp. Receiving their news, after a long time I was able to sleep in peace.

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- *Burma* Burma is present day Myanmar.
 - *Chakma* Indigenous Tibeto-Burman population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh. The Chittagong Hill Tracts are home to many such tribes like Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Murung, Khumi, etc.
 - *I.Sc* Public examination (then called 'Intermediate') after finishing high school; now known as Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC).

Reincarnated

Md. Abdul Khalek Talukdar

Assistant Librarian, Annoda Gobinda Public Library, Pabna

1971. Back then I was working as a clerk at the Department of Taxation in Pabna Municipality. Showing solidarity with [Bangabandhu](#) † [Sheikh Mujib's](#) † call for strike, I refrained from official work from [March 7](#) † to [March 25](#) †. The Pakistan government declared martial law on the night of March 25 while they instigated the most heinous genocide of the century. That night, they arrested the prominent political leaders of Pabna as well, along with the Vice Chairman of Pabna Municipal Corporation and a prominent lawyer Mr. Amin Uddin, Dentist Sri Amalendu Dakshi, businessman and proprietor of Tripti Niloy Mr. Sayeed Talukdar among many others.

[March 26](#) †, 1971. In an announcement on Radio Pakistan, all officials were ordered to resume their regular office duties. Failure to do so would result in being sacked from the job with a possible sentence of 10 years imprisonment. After hearing the news, I started for my office to check on my colleagues. But on my way, I halted when I saw two Pakistani soldiers rushing towards me wielding their rifles. Fearing for my life, I stoodfrozen in the middle of the road. One of the soldiers poked me with the front of his rifle and asked me while swearing in Urdu, "*Saale, Tum kahan ja raha hai...* You Jerk! Where are you going?"

I was not that fluent in Urdu. Nevertheless, I answered based on what little I had learned in elementary school, "*Dekhiye, hum to humara duty mein ja raha hai...* I am only going to my job."

They again cursed, "*Saale, Tum jante nahin, curfew hai...* You Jerk! Don't you know there is a curfew going on?"

I replied, "*Main to janti hu, lekin president Yahya ye baat bola hai jo admi naukri se join kiya nahi, usko naukri chala jayega. Isi liye hum humara duty-se ja raha hu...* I know about that, but President [Yahya](#) † has declared that those who won't join their offices will lose their jobs. That's why I am going to my office."

Hearing my reply they cursed in Urdu again and slapped me hard. I could not avoid it and fell down on the road. They dragged me away to their vehicle and ordered me to get in. They climbed in after me as well. One of the soldiers who was already in the vehicle started shouting, "*Ye saale lok humara par talwar se hamla kiya...* This bastard attacked us with a sword." After that they began to torture me—slapping, punching, and kicking me all over. They also poked me with the rifle, beat me with an iron bar, and smashed my hands with the army boot. I did not realize what my crime was. Tears started flowing down my eyes and everything became blurred.

They picked up a few other men in their vehicle. I can still remember that among them were the proprietor of 'Adruk', Mr. Abdul Hamid

Khan, Abu Musa Moktar, cigarette sales agent Habib [bhai](#) †, and Optometrist N. Islam. All of them used to own licensed firearms. Could that be their crime? Anyway, we were brought to the BSCIC (Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation) industrial area which was the basecamp of the Pak Army. We were dragged down from the vehicle. They fastened our hands behind us.

All of us were standing in a line side by side. After half an hour, a major came in. We were untied and he started taking notes of our alleged misdeeds. Then they put us in a room and ordered us to do a military march right there. At around 12 noon, the major came again. According to the notes of our alleged crimes, we were put in three separate lines. I was put in the last line. Whoever was in that line was either a politician or a wealthy person, only I was the one that was neither. A sense of intense fear was engulfing me.

Then began the trials. They started beating the people in the first line with a thick stick. Then they packed them in a vehicle and sent them towards the city. Now it was the turn for the people in the second line. First they were ordered to lie down on the floor, then they were beaten mercilessly with the same thick stick in a way that someone would try to kill a snake. Then they ordered, "Double-march!" The captives started running for their lives. In the last line remained only five of us, among which were the arrested persons from the previous night, Mr. Amin Uddin, Mr. Dakshi, and Mr. Sayeed Talukdar.

All of us were again sent back into the previous room. On the night of March 25, many a people had been imprisoned in that room; the stench of their feces and urine nearly suffocated us. When we complained about it, they put us under a tree while they cleaned the room. Then we were brought back to the room. When Mr. Sayeed Talukdar needed to use the toilet he asked for my trainer shoes, defecated in the shoe and threw it out the window. It was almost time for evening prayer. We went to the nearby pond to wash ourselves for the prayer. After saying our prayers, I prayed to Allah to save us from these persecutors. It seems Allah may have indeed listened to my prayer, otherwise I would not have lived to this date.

There was another significant incident during that fateful night of March 26. On that night, our freedom fighters ambushed and killed about twenty-five Pakistani soldiers near the telephone exchange. For that reason, the rest of the soldiers had fled from there to the BSCIC industrial area. After that, fearful for their safety, they had sent a wireless message to Dhaka on March 27. It did not take long before an army airplane came with reinforcements. Under cover of relentless firing, the soldiers prepared to flee from the BSCIC industrial area.

Before fleeing, they came back one last time, prepared to kill us. They ordered, "*Ye admi khara ho jao, Pith se pith lagao ...* You people stand up, and stand back to back." In the face of death, we started to take Allah's name. We forgot about our families and the whole world around us. I could not remember when I had fainted thinking about my imminent death, neither could I remember when they fired upon us. After regaining consciousness I found myself on the floor, lying on my back. I felt an immense pain on my back. Everyone was squirming in agony. A captive called Rajem suffered from insanity and he was screaming incessantly for water. The whole room was flooded in blood. I was lying on that pool of blood, somehow clinging to my life. I noticed that my abdominal motion indicated that I was still breathing, so I tried to roll over on my stomach and a bullet came out from half an inch inside my back and dropped on the floor. Wherever I looked, I saw stains of blood. Four people slowly succumbed to their injuries in front of my very eyes. If I had been a weak hearted person, I would have had a heart attack. Anyway, keeping my faith in Allah, I stayed back in that sea of blood without moving. I was not able to scream out of fear, thinking that somebody might shoot me again.

After some time, the soldiers came back to the room, fastened our legs with ropes and like dogs dragged all of us out into a trench. My leg was fastened as well. I was thrown to the bottom of the stairs from the veranda. The impact of me landing on the hard floor of the stairs fractured my nose. It started to bleed much more than I did when I had got shot. I felt as if my heart had stopped beating. Again I thought better of crying out as they considered me dead. If they found out that I was alive, they would have ensured my death by shooting me again. That was around ten in the morning. After throwing me in the trench, they hurled Sayeed Talukdar's dead body on top of me. Then they left the place. I stayed there like that with a dead body on top of me till around one in the afternoon. Words cannot describe the fear, the anguish, and the tension I felt during that time.

After around 1 p.m., the freedom fighters came to the place of the incident. After seeing all the dead bodies they cried out in grief, "They have killed them all!" Hearing their voices, I shouted out, "Hey, who's talking?" I believed that they would save me as they were speaking in fluent Bangla, and I was right. One of the [Mukti Bahini](#) † fighters heard my pleas of agony and shouted, "There is someone still alive down there!"

They rescued me from that well of death. They wanted to carry me on their shoulders. Despite the excruciating pain, I walked on my own, along with them. I was awfully thirsty and asked for some water. They had none but asked me to hold on for a little bit more. They took me to the Krishnapur area of the municipality and gave me some bread and water. I heaved a sigh of relief. They brought me to the Police Hospital. But not a single doctor was present there. Hence I returned home, still severely wounded. My house at that time was situated within the premises of the Kalachandpara water tank. Even after reaching home, I sensed danger. None of my family members were there. A Mukti Bahini fighter named Madan took me to his house. He helped me change my blood-stained clothes and gave me some rice with warm ghee (clarified butter) mixed to eat. I duly ate and after that went out in search of my family members. But nobody could tell me their whereabouts. Some said they were still in town; others claimed they had left town and went to the river delta. Mental anguish set in with my physical pain. I was deeply worried. I couldn't even speak at that time.

The next day, March 28, hearing the news that I am still alive, my family members hurriedly ran to Madan's house from the delta. I felt as if I had found my lost world, my life. My family, along with my neighbors thought that I was dead. My wife could not believe her eyes when she saw me. She just stared at my face in awe. She did not utter a single word. I cannot fathom how dreadful the feelings of desperation and loss might have been to bring on such a silence. I tried hard to pacify her but failed. She fainted within a few minutes. She did not regain consciousness even after we fanned and sprinkled some water on her. So we brought her to our house. I put her under the water tap and continuously poured water for some hours. Only then did she regain her senses. I asked my eldest daughter to cook some rice. After my arrest, they had not slept or eaten for three days. They had only wept. I do not know whether any nation in the world had shed that much tear from innocent eyes only for independence.

Anyway, we all ate a little after the rice was cooked. My wife was still suffering from shock. After being quiet for some time, she suddenly cried out, "You are still alive! I thought the Pak soldiers have killed you all!"

On that very day, we all left the municipality area and started for Dogachi. There, after receiving some medical treatment and care, she recovered. I remained at Dogachi for a few days with my family. Despite constant fear and great worry, I started to regain some of my mental fortitude. But when the blood thirsty Pak soldiers recaptured the whole area on April 10, my strength was again shattered.

They announced that everyone had to join their jobs by April 26. I started to enquire about the office after returning from Dogachi. I wondered what would happen when I go to the office. If the soldiers came to know that I had survived their bullets that would surely spell my

doom.

One day the military attacked Dogachi. On their way to Dogachi, they burnt down every village they found, killed people mercilessly, and went on a rampage of loot, murder, and rape. I was in town at my office at that time. On my way back, I saw that there were several dead bodies on both sides of the road. I shivered in fear and thought possibly none of my family members had survived. After reaching home and seeing all my family members, I felt a relief that few could have imagined.

Here is another incident. Several of us had fled to Char Balrampur. The military suddenly attacked there. Many people died that day as well. After luckily surviving once more, I thought it was better to flee to India. But that was not to be as the military was everywhere. We had to return to Dogachi. Then along with my whole family, I took shelter in Arifpur, at one of my colleagues' house. After some days, we returned to our house in Kalachandpara and found out that the Pak soldiers had started collecting water from the water tank near our house every day in their vehicles. The fear in our mind would remain as before.

One day, when we were having lunch, a soldier suddenly showed up. He said he had lost his way. I saw the devil in his eyes. Was he checking in to see whether any male members of the family were in the house? May be he had something else on his mind, maybe he was looking for some other opportunity. Regardless, I showed him the way back.

I remember the time when I used to put bamboo barricades up and sat by the Mujahid Club to collect municipal taxes. There were people, my fellow countrymen, who feared me, suspected me. They thought that I had switched sides. One day, someone asked me where my chains were. I replied that somebody had taken them. (*Using chains metaphorically to imply allegiance -Editor*).

I had been doing a second job at the Annada Gobinda Public Library at the heart of the town for about fifteen years. Out of a sense of duty, I used to open up the library every day after returning from work. But even that was not spared from the terror. Whenever they saw the library open, Pak soldiers would come and ask for books and maps. They would tell me to look for all the maps inside. They took away all of them—maps of Pabna, Bangladesh, even the world map.

True, I could not save the paper map of my country from them at that time. But our fearless sons were able to protect the country in that map, to snatch away victory, and independence. The glory of their success has helped me forget the shame of my own failure.

Air Raid on Train

Dr. Khasruzzaman Choudhury*

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The three of us—Sub-divisional Police Officer Mr. Motalib, the Magistrate of Kishoreganj Mr. Golam Akbar and I—were listening to the police wireless set. Even after a while we didn't get any news of much worth. Since [March 26](#) †, we had received a lot of information about the events at different places from that wireless set. But the stream of news had started to dry up. Perhaps the enemy soldiers had been seizing the areas covered under the police wireless sets.

On April 3, 1971, upon returning from the police station, Mr. Motalib, Mr. Golam Akbar, and I met for a discussion on the veranda of my house. The light had started to fade, but the evening was yet to set in. We were tense. We had no idea what was going on in different areas, nor did we have any idea what might happen next.

Mr. Motalib started talking first, "Assessing the situation, I think we should send away our families somewhere distant. Anything can happen at any instant. Besides, their presence can also be a hindrance to our activities."

I kept quiet for a while. Where could I send my family in such uncertain and dark times? And what guarantee did I have that they would be safer there?

Mr. Motalib continued discussing the topic further. He had a relative living in Astagram. But Astagram was quite far from Kishoreganj and the commuting facilities were not so good. He said that he had decided to send his family there and asked my permission to go ahead with the plan.

Of the three of us, Mr. Golam Akbar was the most worried and therefore the most restless. You could see the dread in his face and eyes. Finally he said, "I think we better send the three families to the same place. They can help one another when in danger."

Finally the decision was that Mr. Motalib would send his family to Astagram, and Mr. Akbar and I would send our families to the village of Nabinagar, not far from Brahmanbaria. In order to get to Nabinagar, we would have to board a launch at the Kuliarchar water-terminal.

We did not have much time. Packing our bags as fast as we could, we left for Kishoreganj train station and reached there around 3 o'clock in the morning. Regular train communication had already stopped. Under my orders and supervision, only one small train was commuting from Kishoreganj to Bhairab. Those were uncertain times—the passengers were all strangers brought together by the necessity to move.

The two families, boarded the train at around 4:00 a.m. It was completely dark all around. That train had only two compartments connected with the engine. With my permission, the station master gestured the train to proceed. It started to move slowly.

It took us about an hour and twenty minutes to reach Kuliarchar. The local authority had been informed of our arrival beforehand, so a launch had been arranged from somewhere. With a heavy heart, we said goodbye to our families. We knew where they were going, but no one could ensure their safe journey to the destination. Who could provide guarantee of a safe journey at that time?

A lot of people had gathered at the launch terminal. Since the regular-scheduled launch trip was not available, many of them wanted to go on the launch that we arranged. We could have said no but what would be the point to deny help to others? Perhaps, more people could be helpful if there were any trouble. So I gave them permission to board. Mr. Akbar and I were in tears when the launch was leaving the terminal with our families. Without a word, I looked far away into the emptiness.

As the launch disappeared from our view, we returned to the Kuliarchar police station. I was very depressed as I had no idea what end I had sent my wife and my eight month old son to. Who knew when we would see each other again! Everything was so uncertain!

We were supposed to return to Kishoreganj by the same route. Before boarding the train, I came to know that there was quite a bit of unrest at Kishoreganj due to my absence. People had started to talk and there were a lot of rumors around the town. Without further delay, Mr.

Akbar and I got on the train. I had a wish to stay for a while to collect more information from Kuliarchar. However, after receiving the news of Kishoreganj, I thought we better not stay there much longer.

It was about eight in the morning when the train slowly started towards Kishoreganj. After twenty minutes, the train reached Sararchar, the next station. The Sararchar station was crowded. People were saying that they had seen aircrafts of the Pakistani occupation army in the sky.

Mr. Golam Akbar and I looked at each other. It did not seem safe to wait at this station. I was not confident about traveling towards Kishoreganj either. I heard the noise of the planes far away. We didn't know what motive the airplanes had. Were they coming after our train?

Eventually we left Sararchar and moved towards Kishoreganj. We hadn't traveled more than a couple of miles when we heard the sound of the planes and gunfire close to us. They seemed like Sabre jets. Bullets were hailing down on the train.

The situation was very chaotic. We heard the train driver shouting. Someone from the next compartment also shouted, "They are firing at us. Get off the train and lie down on the ground."

I had no idea what was going on. I heard the jets once more and there was another round of firing. It reminded me of the hail storms we used to have at our home in Sylhet. They were firing aimlessly. It didn't seem that there was any casualty.

But there was little time to think. Golam Akbar dragged me off the train. By this time, the other passengers had also jumped off the train and were crawling. Some were lying on their stomach.

I was shell-shocked and tried to think what to do next. Then again I heard the voice of Golam Akbar, "Lay down close to the ground. The aircrafts are coming back to fire again."

Kuliarchar and Sararchar were not downstream areas but these areas used to get inundated by flood water. Hence the railway track was elevated from the surrounding grounds. There was not much water around then. The ground on either side of the railway tracks had a downward-slope and eventually merged with the surrounding lands.

Mr. Akbar and I lay face down on one of the slopes. The aircrafts again poured a stream of bullets. We were lying still. We heard some cries but could not be sure who were shot.

The aircrafts returned and fired again. I had no doubt anymore that they were targeting us and the train. This time the bullets hit very close to us. It seemed as if the thunders were coming down from the sky to meet us. At one point I thought I had been shot in the leg, but my reactions were so numb that I was afraid to even move my legs. After a while, I realized that I had not been hit. But there was nothing to do other than lying there stiff.

Everything had gone silent. No one was making any sound. It was hard to know if anyone was hurt from the air raid. We remained quiet and after some time it seemed the jets were flying away.

We lay still for some more time as a precaution. There was a long pause and finally silence fell in. Golam Akbar and I stood up and started checking on the others. Quite surprisingly, no one was hurt or hit, but an elderly person and a boy had fainted in fear. We splashed water on their faces to bring them back to consciousness.

We looked at each other. We were in a dilemma—whether we should wait here or start for Kishoreganj. The driver of the train informed us that the engine had not been hit, but there were three or four holes from the gunshots in a compartment. We examined the holes with the driver. Had those shots hit someone, they would have died.

We started for Kishoreganj at around a quarter to ten. There were two other passengers in the compartment with us; two unfamiliar faces that were blanched in fear, as if their blood was drained. Were we looking the same? I don't know. We could have died had the bullets been an inch or two to the side. So, if my face looked dreadful like theirs, it would not have been surprising.

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- The narrator was the Sub-divisional Officer (SDO) of Kishoreganj in 1971. An SDO is a government official in charge of a portion of a district (sub-division).

The Uncertain Journey

Tahmina Zaman

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[Wife of Dr. Khasruzzaman Choudhury, author of the previous narration]

It was well past sunset, but we hadn't realized it, since all the doors and windows were shut tight. A bunch of us had been confined under a bed since earlier in the day. This was the beginning of April, 1971—we were surrounded by death.

The sunny, beautiful afternoon turned into a horrific evening as several Sabre jets started to fly over us. Till then, we had no idea what was about to happen. I was just about to feed my 8 month old baby. After feeding him a few teaspoons of milk, I was about to give him some more, and then... my hand shook fiercely and the spoon dropped. A terrible noise broke out, that shook the entire house. The tin walls of the house rattled loudly. All of us in that room were stunned. No one made a peep of a sound, there was only fear and anxiety in our eyes. What was about to happen? The scared little baby in my arms buried his face in my bosom.

We were staying at my aunt's place in the village of Nabinagar. As soon as the noises outside started to subside a little, my aunt told us to go and take shelter in her room. That particular room was towards the back of the house. It was a good distance from the tree-lined street. It did not draw attention easily from outside, hence was much safer.

I was paralyzed with fear, I felt as if I had lost even the courage to cross the courtyard and make it to my aunt's room. I looked up at the sky through the window just once. The vast, open sky was reassuring me...do not be afraid. Yet fear had engulfed me, I could not look up again. What if someone saw me? What if splinters came through the window and hit me?

Perhaps a few minutes had passed, and then we heard that roaring sound again—the horrendous, loud, terrifying sound that was completely foreign to us. It sounded like the catastrophic roar of bombs—never ending roars. It was impossible to remain composed hiding under the bed, neither did it feel safe. With quite an effort, I took a deep breath, and ran for the next room. Everyone was hiding under the bed in that room as well. I joined them too. I held my baby close and started to pray.

The deafening noise outside kept increasing—it was an unbearable situation. At the same time, it sounded like hail was hitting the house from all around, as well as the roof. Were they dropping bombs all around us? Were the splinters from the bombs chasing us? No way of knowing for sure. In such catastrophic circumstances, any strange noise, loud or not, added to the horrific environment. We did not know what else could happen. Our ears were ringing from all the loud noise. We were afraid of getting hit by something any moment. I hid my boy under me and hunched over him to protect him with my own body. This way, if an attack came, I would bear the brunt, at least my baby would be spared.

The noise did not stop; it kept going on... relentlessly. It was unsettling. We all started to get exhausted. My baby was so scared that he threw up all over the floor under the bed. Whatever little milk I had given him was out of his stomach... but there was nothing I could do. We all kept hunching over on the floor in that vomit.

The Sabre jets were still flying overhead, making a dreadful noise. It felt as if the jets were diving down near the trees around the house, and then disappearing up in the sky again, trying to terrorize us. Were they looking for this particular house? It was a possibility! All government employees were traitors in their eyes. My cousin was the Sub-Divisional Officer (SDO) of Brahmanbaria – a ‘traitor’. My husband, the SDO of Kishoreganj, – also a ‘traitor’. Did they know we had fled and come here to seek refuge?

The noises outside were starting to die down. We were still under the bed. We couldn’t summon the courage to come out. What if we got out and saw that the (Pakistani) military had come down from their planes and were standing at our door? What if they descended in parachutes and started searching every house? What if they crossed the river by launch from the nearby harbor and surrounded the house? I could not think anymore.

Again we heard noises. Now it was the wailing from all around us... heart wrenching cries! But what could I do? For a moment, I wished if only I could just hold my baby close and fly away like a bird, somewhere safe, where these horrendous sounds would not haunt us anymore.

We were all lying there motionless. Then we heard someone at the front door saying, “Open the door; open the door.” In that time of mortal danger, the sound of a human voice pushed us further into the grips of death instead of awakening us. My aunt only raised her right hand index finger and put it over her lips, signaling us to keep quiet.

Again that voice, “Open the door.” But who was going to go check and see who had come at a time like this, who will open the door! My cousin Kabir had just completed his Matriculation exam; my younger brother Eeku was also very young. They were both lying under the bed, scared to death! If someone went, it would have to be one of them. No, there was no need, who knew what the man’s intentions were!

I was contemplating such possibilities when my aunt suddenly said, “What if it is Jahangir?” Jahangir lived four miles away in a village called Kanikara. Why would he risk coming here under such dangerous circumstances, and how would he come? We could do nothing but wait in silence giving my aunt some time to attempt at recognizing the voice outside.

We were all quiet as before, then the man at the door called again: “Open the door.” Finally, we had to open the door. My aunt had guessed right; Jahangir [bhai](#) † was standing at the door.

There was fear in Jahangir bhai’s face and eyes. He looked pale, his hair in complete disarray. Out of breath, he entered the house. He lowered his voice and said that he had come to fetch us. He had heard rumors that the enemy forces were proceeding towards Bhairab to set up camps. The jets were sent to conduct a survey of the area, as well as to intimidate the locals. They can enter Nabinagar at any moment, via the river. My heart started to race. I hadn’t even realized that my baby was lying motionless all this time in wet clothes. I wiped my tears and came out from under the bed with my son.

My aunt told us to get ready quickly. Staying there was not safe anymore. Along with my younger sister, my cousin, and her two little children, I followed my aunt’s instructions. We left the house immediately in whatever clothes we had on. As for spare clothes, we had a little sack that was hastily packed. My aunt, uncle, and Kabir stayed behind.

Dusk had just settled in Nabinagar, it was dark all around us. Every now and then, we saw fireflies and heard jackals howling from far away. The path from the house to the river was eerie. We needed to walk without making much sound. But my flip-flops were digging into the sticky mud and hit the underside of my foot, making a noise every time I tried to take a step. I couldn’t tell between water and mud in that darkness. Walking fast was the most important thing. We could hear the cries of people from the homes on the outskirts of the village. It felt as if the entire population was riding a wave of sound, mixed with cries, lamenting, and screams. Maybe some were dead, or injured; perhaps some were yet to return home.

Jahangir bhai did not say a word during the entire walk. Talking was prohibited. We were proceeding according to the instructions he had given us earlier. We would get on a boat after reaching the river. Then on to Kanikara.

Who Jahangir bhai was, what he did - I had no idea at the time. Yet he had risked his life, and made the dangerous journey to come and get us. We felt grateful. Later I came to know that he had never forgotten a favor my father had done him in the past. When he had heard that my father’s children were in danger in Nabinagar, he came rushing from Kanikara. He had somehow escaped the firing of the Sabre jets and reached Nabinagar. My eyes were in tears out of immense respect for this man.

Jahangir bhai was prudent, he started to look for a boat. After a hard bargain, he had managed to persuade a boatman who would take us from Nabinagar to Kanikara.

After reaching the river bank, we boarded a small boat. The boat started to move along very slowly, keeping close to the edge of the river bank. It was as if the paddle was hitting the darkness – nothing was visible. Far away in the darkness we saw flames lighting up the night like fireworks. Were they burning down the village?

Thinking about the people in that village, I felt a sense of emptiness inside me, brought on by sheer terror and fear. All I could do was to clutch my baby even tighter. None of us could say how long it took us to cross those four miles. It was only natural for us to have lost track of time in that terror.

While trying to get off the boat, I slipped. The boat was carrying more load than its capacity, and therefore, it was wobbling. Actually it was wobbling dangerously the entire journey.

We had to walk a considerable distance on the aail (narrow ridge of the crop-fields). Before, I used to enjoy the challenge and skill required to walk on an aail, but on that terrifying night, it was not fun at all.

At last we reached Kanikara. Almost all of us were up the entire night. Our eyes were heavy with sleep, but we could not fall asleep. At last, that grotesque night came to an end as the sun came up. I recalled that it was the 1st of Baishakh, the Bangla New Year – April 15 according to the Gregorian calendar. Like flashes of lightning, I wondered about my loved ones – where was my husband, where were my parents, my kith and kin? But above all, the sharp pang that I felt again and again was the thought of my baby, would he survive?

Two more nights passed like this. Next morning we were surprised to see Kabir! What was going on? As we all gathered around, Kabir told us that he had heard in Nabinagar bazaar that enemy soldiers might come to Kanikara and the surrounding villages any moment. Bhairab was already under siege. So my aunt sent him to tell us that we needed to move to another village as soon as possible.

We were all speechless. How long could we live on the run like this, in our own country, on our own soil? How much longer? Where could we run?

In Front of the Loved Ones

Nazma Begum

Housewife, Dhaka

March 26 †, 1971. Bangladesh Water Development Board, O&M Circle, Sylhet. We used to live in the Superintendent Engineer's house. I had sent Tajul Islam, our servant, to bring some eggs for breakfast that morning. He returned with the news that a curfew had been declared and a rickshaw-puller and a local betel leaf seller had been shot to death by the Pakistani soldiers. A little later we observed from our balcony that many people had gathered at a place called Maniratila. I wondered what the gathering was about. How many were being shot to death by the barbaric occupation army? We were panic-stricken and remained at home. Curfew was being enforced in Sylhet from dawn to dusk almost every day. Hence, people had much difficulty with their everyday lives. My husband, Shaheed (martyr) Altaf Hossain would do some grocery for our daily meals every evening after the curfew was lifted. Our lives carried on like this.

A Forest Officer used to live on the hillock next to ours. On April 1, he had heard that freedom fighters might have an encounter with the Pakistani Army on the valley between the two houses and he decided to abandon his home. We also decided it was not safe to live in our house any longer, and moved to the house of Mr. Shafiullah, Superintendent Engineer of the Roads and Highways department. After staying there for two days, my husband became very restless as the salaries for that month had not been paid to his office staff. Without salary, they would starve. On April 3, he would not wait any longer. He went to his office, then to the bank, and paid the due salaries. He was much calmer and relaxed after all the staff had received their monthly payment.

Later that day we returned home from Mr. Shafiullah's house. We spent the night in fear. Next morning we found the city to be very quiet; it was filled with dreadful uncertainty. I sent Tajul to the Port Market in our locality to buy some food. Upon returning he said that he had seen no military or their vehicles in the city. My husband 'hoped' that they might have fled from Sylhet town. Everything seemed quiet till 3:45 p.m., when two helicopters flew over our house and two pickup trucks passed by our house towards the [cantonment](#) †. Suddenly there was the sound of heavy gunfire and mortar shells. It lasted till the Maghrib prayer time. From all the noise, we understood that the military had infiltrated the city again. We came down from upstairs and took shelter in the room under the staircase. We went back upstairs long after the sound of the firings had ebbed away. Around midnight, my husband woke up and peeked outside through the window to check the situation outside. He could see that the sky had turned red in the direction of the airport. We assumed that the military had set the fire. We spent another night in great anxiety.

The next day, April 5, the firing started again from six in the morning. The firing was more intense than the previous day. We ran downstairs to take shelter under the staircase again. We did not even get a chance to eat anything that day. Around 12 p.m., a few soldiers banged on our door. We were very scared; but my husband had to open the door. I was standing close to him. One soldier started calling names immediately, then asked if we were Hindus or Muslims and who he was. My husband replied that he was the Superintendent Engineer at the Water Development Board and he also informed them that we were Muslims. Even then, they brought us outside the house and made us line up and ordered to put our hands up. We obeyed in fear. My husband's office was almost 40 feet downhill from our house. They almost dragged us those 40 feet to the office building. The whole lot of us - me, Nazma Begum (30), my husband Altaf Hossain (48), son Arif Hossain (15), daughter Nayyar Sultana (10), son Anwar Hossain (3), and youngest daughter Selina Sultana (1) were standing close to one another. I was four and a half months pregnant at that time. They made my husband stand by the wall of his office building. Even then we believed that they would let us go after some interrogation. But no, we were ordered to move away from him. Initially, I did not want to step away from him. But they threatened me. Fearing for my honor, I took my children and stood a little further from him. Then the soldiers moved towards the steps on the slope. At that moment an officer in a green cap appeared in a Jeep and conferred a little with them. Even then, I was hoping that they would let all of us go.

But they never had any intention of doing that. One of the soldiers fired his rifle three times and my husband fell down in an instant. My son Arif Hossain ran towards him calling out, "Abba (Father)!" and collapsed in a heap over his dead body. The soldiers targeted their rifles again and started counting "1, 2 ..." But before they got to 3, another soldier spoke in Urdu, "Sharif, chor do, o chhota aadmi hai... Sharif, let it go. He is only a young kid." They put their rifles down and ordered us to leave the place. When my son came near me, his hands and clothes were drenched red with blood. My daughter Nayyar Sultana burst out in tears, "Ammma, what will happen to us? They have killed Abba!"

They did not let me see my husband any longer and hustled us away from there. We had to leave my martyr husband's body behind and move towards the town. We took shelter in a nearby house and spent the night there somehow. The next day, a person from the PDB (Power Development Board) took us in after hearing about the death of my husband. We were at his home for a day. On April 7, several persons from the office buried my husband. The PDB engineer took Arif to the burial. After the funeral, I moved towards Gopalganj with my children and took lodging in a local's house. They welcomed us with love and sympathy. After spending quite a few days there, on April 30, we returned to our home in Sylhet. We found that everything had been looted, not a single thing was left. Executive Engineer Mr. Nazrul Islam helped us out that day with food. We stayed at his house for the next few days and then left for Dhaka on May 16. We moved in with a relative of mine in Dhaka.

Ever since then I have written to the government many times for assistance but I haven't received any help whatsoever. I have been living a

life of hardship and misery with my young orphaned children. And now, I have even lost sight in my eyes .

Right Before My Eyes

Ahmed Bashir

Author, Dhaka

On April 7, we came from Moghbazar to [Old Dhaka](#) †. There was an eerie silence in the Moghbazar area by then. It felt like a ghost town – desolate and deserted. From time to time, we could hear the sound of [Azaan](#) † from the mosque next to our house. It felt as if the sound melted itself with the smell of gunpowder.

At that time everyone else was fleeing to their villages. We did not have any place to go, as we didn't have a 'village home' to go to. My family had been in Dhaka for many generations. My dad worried, "I don't see any other way out, we are the only family in this large area, how can we continue to stay here?" He was right. Where could we go? We decided to, at least, move from our residence and take shelter with the few relatives we still had in the Old Dhaka.

We used to have an old tri-band Murphy radio. I had almost worn it out by repeatedly tuning into the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Service and Akashvani Kolkata (India). Moreover, the Chanda Battery dry-cells were also old. Not a single shop was open in Moghbazar that I could buy new ones from. On that very radio, the afternoon of March 28, we had heard the voice of [Ziaur Rahman](#) † – he declared our independence and called for armed resistance on behalf of [Bangabandu](#) † [Sheikh Mujibur Rahman](#) †.

On the afternoon of April 6, I came out of our house without informing anyone. I had only Tk. 3.50 in my pocket. The air was heavy with the scent of gunpowder in the silent neighborhood. The curfew had been relaxed till two in the afternoon. I was on my way to Malibagh from Moghbazar through the Wireless Colony, to find out if any shops were open there, so that I could buy some batteries. The colony was noiseless, not a single family around; cats, dogs, and chickens were walking on the roads. My mind started to wander, as I reminisced... the continuous roars at the [Racecourse Field](#) †, the helicopter of [Tikka Khan](#) † overhead, the flag with the map of Bangladesh, the sessions on the elements of bomb-making at the Nayatola house, the drills of the youth at Modhubagh field before the [Mukti Bahini](#) † was formed... When suddenly...

There was a shout, "Halt!"

I looked up to see a Pakistani soldier pointing his gun straight at my chest, grass and dirt was on his helmet, an ammunition belt hanging across his chest.

"Hands Up!"

I, the 16 year-old teenager who had paraded with the Prak (pre)-Mukti Bahini group and had attended sessions about bombmaking ears, stood there helpless, with hands in the air.

I stood there under the unforgiving sun for more than an hour. No one else had come behind the Wireless Station. I had to repeat "Pakistan Zindabad... Long live Pakistan" many times, recite the "Kalema Tayyab"* quite a few times as well. I was thinking that he wouldn't shoot me, but he might take me inside the station. Behind the iron-gate, there was a truck with a black cover. After a while, I saw four or five Bangalis sitting on the truck. They looked at me with blank looks in their eyes—I stared back at them.

I hadn't bought the batteries. When I was released, I ran straight back home. The very next day, we started for Old Dhaka. We took shelter in a tattered old house there—it was pretty much an abandoned, run down building. The bricks were chipped, the plaster had come off; undoubtedly, that was the oldest house on Court House Street. The street behind Shakhari Potti was red with blood. The drains were flowing red. As soon as our rickshaw entered, my cousins shouted out when they saw us. We were alive after all!

The environment at Old Dhaka was different. There were countless people there. Seeing more looting opportunities, the army and their collaborators were raiding houses and looting all day long. People were running away with trunks. The raiders were breaking the locks of houses. There were screams of women somewhere. There was something happening all the time. I snuck out on another day. The afternoon curfew was in effect. But that was on the main road, Nawabpur road. In the smaller lanes, people were running helter skelter—fleeing. I can't clearly analyze those scenes observed as a teenager, even today... who were those people—those who screamed, who fled with trunks, who did the looting, who broke into the houses?

At the door of a three-storied building at Ramakanto Nandi Lane, I saw a woman shouting in a shrill voice, "Abinash... Abinash dear!" I can't say whether the lady got to find Abinash finally, because I saw four men with daggers in their hands closing the door in front of the laundry.

Beddings and books. These were the things that no one had taken. I remember clearly: there was a gutter behind our house, and beyond that gutter were the houses of Shakhari Potti. On both sides of the gutter, trash had accumulated. Everything was covered within 24 hours with huge piles of things dumped. On those piles of beddings, I looked for books. There were so many books dumped there... There was Tagore, along with the Loknath Panjika (Hindu Almanac). I had actually found a copy of Deenendra Kumar Roy's "Polli Boichitro" (Diversity of Rural Life) right there on that dump.

After darkness, there were gunfire and the wails of people. Amidst those sounds, you could hear the Azaan from the mosques around Dhaka city. As the night grew deeper, everyone turned off their lights. In the light of kerosene lanterns, they would have their meals and talk in whispers.

I turned on the Murphy radio again. It was quarter to ten at night. The clarinets played in Kolkata. I was preparing to listen to VOA (Voice of America) at ten, when suddenly there was a horrifying scream from that gutter. Just once and then silence. I tiptoed to the spot. I climbed over the wall and carefully made my way towards the old house by stepping over the pile of beddings and books. Right before my eyes: five people had pinned someone and were stabbing him in the chest again and again.

□ *Kalema Tayyab* - The primary Islamic verse. Pakistani Army asked their captives to recite the verse to identify if they were Muslims. Non-Muslims would have to embrace terrible fate.

Face to Face with Death

Maqid Haider

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If only they had looked up, it would have been certain death for my mother and me.

April 10. I still cannot clearly grasp everything from that afternoon on that fateful day in 1971. I cannot say for certain how long the two of us had waited facing death that day. The realization that we had escaped death took some time to sink in.

The city of Pabna fell to the Pakistan Army on April 10. Those who were witnesses to the horrors of [March 25](#) † in Dhaka knew how desperate people were to escape from there. People started to flee the capital any way they could. We tried as well, but could not make it out of Dhaka before April 7. We failed to get on the EPRTC (East Pakistan Roads Transport Corporation) bus once, and then sort of resigned to our fate. On the 6th, my second eldest brother came home from office and told us that he had managed a Jeep from his office and it would take as many of us as would fit in it.

Except for him, all of us started for Pabna the next day. I remember us praying to Allah until we had crossed the Mirpur Bridge. Only when we had reached Aminbazar could we start to breathe a little more normally.

But that relief was short-lived. Though we had escaped the clutches of the army, the storm we faced when we were ferrying across Aricha to the Nagarbari water-terminal was terrible. I thought none of us would make it across alive. But we did. We could not reach Pabna that day though; it was almost evening when we reached Nagarbari. Many of the armed young men who were patrolling the Nagarbari docks knew us. They managed shelter and some food for us that night.

We reached Pabna sometime before noon on the 8th. It was free of the enemy at the time. The few soldiers who had been stationed there had died in a battle with the Bangali police and public. We were quite overjoyed with the brief freedom we had. Our only concern at that moment was to listen to Akashvani (India), BBC, VOA (Voice of America), and Radio Pakistan for news on the war, understand, and analyze them. We were watching out for any news on the army's advancement towards Pabna. From what we could make out, there was no imminent danger.

But on the morning of the 10th, news came to us that the army had crossed the river Jamuna and landed at Nagarbari dock. It was about 32 miles away from Pabna. Even though the distance was not that great, we were quite confident that they could not make it to the town that day because our boys had already blown up the bridge near Rajnarayanpur. We were quite sure that they would not be able to arrive on foot.

Our home was in the village of Doharpara, which falls on the left side of the road just as you are coming into Pabna from Nagarbari. Our village home had a big pool and lots of trees all around. We never imagined that the Pak Army would reach there on the very first day. We felt quite safe; we got chicken from the market for lunch. It was a little into the afternoon when lunch was ready. People had been diving and swimming in the pool to cool down a little bit from the heat. That's when someone came running from the north of the village. He was shouting, "Run, run for your lives! Quick! The military have arrived, they have entered the village."

I wasn't sure where all my other siblings got scattered. I just remember that my third oldest sister was in my father's room, running a high fever. She said, "I am sick. What will the soldiers do with me? I don't want to go." But when she saw everyone screaming and running, she was forced to leave as well. Suddenly I realized that the only ones left on the veranda were my mother and me; no one else was in the house. I yanked her out to the yard and ran towards the south-west corner of the estate. That's where the toilets were, a little separated from the main building.

By that time, the army had surrounded our house. There was no way out for the two of us. Only fate could save us now, otherwise a gruesome death awaited us. My cousin Mogol's house, which was to the west of our house, was torched with petrol bombs. They did the same to technician Kalu's house, which was to the north-west. Then I saw them set fire to the hay stacks on our yards and enter our house screaming ferociously and shouting obscenities. I heard them shouting crazily, "*Sab saale lok bhag giya...* All the rascals have escaped!" There were three separate yards on our grounds. They stood there and started to fire indiscriminately. In that rain of bullets, my mother held me tightly to her bosom and lay on the ground as low as she could. We were hiding behind a date-sapling near the toilet. We could not be spotted unless someone came quite close and stood right in front of us. However, if the army looked towards the west from the kitchen of my uncle's house, they would be able to see us from a distance. I told my mother, "Ma, I am going to jump over the wall into Mogol [bhai](#)'s † house."

I could not understand if she told me to stay put or leave. She just held me more tightly and murmured prayers while repeatedly saying 'Allah, Allah'.

At that very moment I saw three to four soldiers peering into the kitchen of my uncle's house. I do not remember how long they were there. All I can recall is the numbing horror that came with the realization that if one of them just looked towards the west, he would see us! Just one look and that would have been the end of us.

Suddenly we heard a horrific cry. Amidst all that noise from gunfire, we could still make out that scream. My mother almost whimpered, but I put my hands on her mouth. She was afraid that the army had shot one of my siblings who hadn't escaped. But right then we had no way of knowing what had really happened.

The army squad was at our house for about half an hour. After they left we waited for quite a while, then stealthily walked into the yard. My father's room was on fire, smoke was coming out. It was the same room where my sister had been resting with fever and was refusing to leave. The army had ransacked the whole place. Boxes, clothes, and a bunch of other stuff were scattered all over the yard. The opened boxes indicated clearly that they had been looking for money, gold, or other valuables to loot.

We were at a loss – where could we go? There was no telling whether the army was waiting some place nearby for us to come out of hiding. The whole village was empty, so was the district road passing right in front of our house that led straight to town. We could hear sporadic gunfire. We did not know where our family was – Zia [bhai](#) †, my third eldest sister Jhorna, second eldest sister-in-law Jhora, my youngest uncle,

younger siblings Hena, Daud, Zahid – there was no trace of any of them. Our own home had turned into a haunted house. I said to my mother, “Ma, let us flee, we will see what fate has in store for us.” My mother could not reply back, she was terrified and restless.

There was a wall on the yard blocking the view from the main gate towards the inside of the house. As I almost carried my mother towards the main gate, I suddenly spotted a head on the other side of that wall. I cried out, “Ma, military!” May be the only reason I screamed was because I knew that this would be the end. I guess my mother felt that too, she held me with all her might. Then I heard, “Rokon, it is me, Bishu bhai.” It took a while for me to register that Bishu was the name of my uncle’s oldest son, he was my cousin!

By that time he had come running to us and was embracing us dearly. He said, “Flee, flee now! Boro Ma (aunt), please flee now!”

My mother started patting his head, chest, and back affectionately and asked, “Where were you, son?”

“Hiding in that bamboo jungle”, he said.

“Where are my children? Are they alive?”

“They’ve all escaped.”

My mother refused to believe him. She started to sob, “Then who screamed out?”

“Scream? No one did”, he said.

From his reply, my mother was certain that one of her children had died. She started to run outside, we followed her. We found Ujjal, lying face down on the ground near the veranda of the outer house. The veranda was flooded with his blood; red fountains splattered on the wall.

It was Ujjal who had cried out when he was shot. Bishu bhai had not heard it. He entered the yard by the back of the outer house, so he had not seen the dead body either.

Ujjal was a kid from our area. He was almost six feet tall, had a very fair complexion and a great physique, but hadn’t matured mentally. He used to come to our house every afternoon for some food. If he wasn’t given any, he would never complain. That day my sister-in-law Jhora had asked him to wait while daal (lentil) was being cooked. So he had been waiting quietly in the veranda of the outer house.

We were not in a position to bury him then. Bishu bhai almost carried my mother to Arifpur by crossing the highway on the south. I followed them. We left our big house in charge of the dead Ujjal, lying there in the ground.

We came back three days later. Ujjal’s corpse had started to rot; it had bloated to almost triple his size. With our noses covered, we dug up a makeshift grave in the garden and buried him.

Sentenced to Death Six Times

Shansher M. Chowdhury (Bir Bikram)*

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of Bangladesh*

Whenever I sit down to write about my dreadful experiences of 1971, I feel that those fearful events continue to haunt me even today. It is unbelievable that I am still alive! As early as on [March 25](#) † or [March 26](#) †, I joined the war against the Pakistani Army. Many other freedomcraving people of our country eventually joined the war. We all knew that we could die at any moment. Until [December 16](#) †, the day the Pakistani Army surrendered, death was not only hanging over our heads but had also engulfed every moment of our lives. But on April 11, 1971 at 11 a.m., I thought I had seen the end. I was on duty to protect the [Kalurghat](#) † Bridge on the ChittagongCox’s Bazar highway. It was by the grace of the Almighty that I have survived to see a liberated Bangladesh, a land that would be free and fair, and only our own.

After the Pakistani Army started its brutal killings on March 25, Major [Ziaur Rahman](#) † declared mutiny. I was his adjutant and trusted co-worker. The terrifying and momentous journey we embarked on that night would end with the ultimate victory on December 16, 1971. Till that victory was earned, the bloodshed was immeasurable, and the deaths were uncountable. Death was my companion in every step. Sleepless nights were very common; because I knew that a few hundred yards from where I sat with my rifle, the Pakistani Army were waiting for opportunities to capture and kill us all. When all the rules and terms of a battlefield become meaningless and the primitive rule, ‘Kill or be killed’ becomes the only mantra, you have to make a choice.

I first faced death on March 27, 1971. I entered Chittagong with a team of ten Bangali soldiers to find out where the Pakistani soldiers had taken positions. Suddenly, our Jeep was targeted from a tall building. The bullets missed us by merely one or two inches. Fortunately, no one among us was hurt.

My escape on March 29 was quite miraculous too. That day we had a gunfight with the Pakistani Army in Chittagong city the whole day. Nearly thirty soldiers were with us. We took position on the Ispahani hill near Askardighi. The Pakistani contingent was large in number. They took their position on the Circuit House hill. The whole day we traded gunfire. Around evening, our ammunition ran out. So we sent a message to our center near Kalurghat Bridge for more ammunition. During the early stages of the Liberation War, the supply of ammunition was very uncertain—so we had to wait quite a while. Suddenly, we noticed that the Pakistani Army had surrounded our hill. The only way out was to escape stealthily and immediately. We did not have sufficient ammunition, we were outnumbered, and moreover, they had a large supply of arms. They would have simply crushed us if they could get to us once.

On March 30, I took my troops and took position on the roofs of some buildings in the Chawkbazar area. Captain Harun Ahmed Chowdhury (later Major General and now the Bangladesh ambassador to Yugoslavia... *the narrator refers to the period of the original book’s publication - Editor*) and some soldiers of the then [East Pakistan Rifles \(EPR\)](#) † were with me. We had closed down the road from Chittagong to Kalurghat. We had managed to keep the very powerful enemy at bay for six days that way. On April 6, the Pakistan Army attacked us with tanks and heavy artillery. Five shots from their 50 Browning rifles came within six inches of me and Captain Harun. We stood still. If the bullets had been only six inches off, neither of us would be alive. During the war, such close calls became a regularity for me.

The exhilarating and rare opportunity to willingly participate in a war for freedom is one thing, and the painful experience of being held captive at the hands of the barbaric, animal-like enemy is quite another story. I had to go through that in 1971 as well. It all started on the morning

of April 11.

I was tasked with holding the Kalurghat Bridge with twenty soldiers. It was a bright morning. The brave and incredibly strong-willed Captain Harun also accompanied us with another twenty EPR men. Undoubtedly, his presence was a great inspiration to all of us. We had been under severe attack from the Pakistani soldiers since morning. Their attacks intensified with every hour and we understood that they were going all out to defeat us. Suddenly we noticed that they were advancing towards us with heavy rockets and mortars. With our inferior weapons and ammunition, we were barely able to defend them. We realized that we were facing imminent danger and continuing this battle would only be suicidal. Just around then, Captain Harun was severely wounded. He was bleeding heavily and we could see him writhing in pain. I instructed my fellow soldiers and the cadets with us to take him to a safer place. As they were carrying him over the long Kalurghat Bridge, I saw the Pakistani forces trying to fire upon them. I got out of the trench and started firing at the enemy, all the while shouting instructions to my men to move across the river.

Suddenly I realized I was alone. A bullet hit me on my hips. Blood started to gush out as I fell down on the bridge. I could feel that the bullet had hit my left thigh, gone through my lower abdomen, and stopped somewhere in my right hip. I was losing a lot of blood but since I lay on the bridge, I did not realize that it had already crushed my hip bone. I tried to get up, but could not. The pain was becoming unbearable, but I was still conscious. I lay there in despair, waiting helplessly for death to come. I thought that there was no way the blood-thirsty enemy would let me live. There was no logic in that—I was their sworn enemy. I also contemplated that it was far better to commit suicide than be tortured mercilessly by those animals. But that was not possible; the impact of the bullet had thrown the Sten gun off my hand. I could not get up, neither could my hands reach it. As I lay there without hope, I left myself to my fate.

I cannot express in words what I felt at that moment. I do not think it is even possible to perceive the dread you feel when you submit yourself to the hands of such barbarians and await your death.

I started to pray to the Almighty for His grace and mercy. He must have heard my prayers; because instead of killing me, the Pakistanis took me as a prisoner, and dragged me by my broken leg for about two hundred yards to their Jeep. My back was torn and blood soaked as I was dragged over the jagged rocks. Thus started my life in captivity. I was not an ordinary prisoner to them. I was a traitor, a rebel. The Geneva Convention did not apply to me. Hence I was subjected to a brutal and endless torture routine, with the added bonus of unquotable obscenities shouted at me. I was given only the most basic treatment for my broken hips. Anything more was prohibited, and my broken hips did not spare me from further physical torment.

When I was admitted to the Chittagong Military Hospital, a major by the name of Meher Kamal attacked me right there in the patient ward. I used to know him beforehand. He came in and started to punch me continually in the chest, face, and nose. My nose started to bleed. He took out his bayonet and thrust it into my chest twice. All the while he was shouting, “You Bangali bastard, I will finish every one of you!” He was also about to gouge out my right eye with his bayonet, shouting, “I am going to pull your eyes out!”

As I tried to shield my eye with my right hand, the bayonet went through my hand. He tried to hit my eye again, but this time it hit my chin instead. The wounds on my chest, chin, and hand from that brutal attack were severe. Luckily, an orderly-nurse came in and stopped him, saving me for the moment. The nurse was a Sindhi*. That terrible incident still sends shivers down my spine and gives me nightmares even to this day.

I was subjected to similar brutality all through my stay at the hospital. The Pakistani soldiers would come at all hours and torture me with rubber wires from electrical appliances or with their bare hands. Once a soldier came, lifted up my broken leg, and then dropped it on the bed. If I try to explain the pain I felt at that, words would fail me. The most terrifying part was that I could not even scream out in pain; that would only invigorate them to continue.

Maybe such heinous acts of cruelty on an injured prisoner were possible only by the barbarous Pakistani Army. Their torture techniques from the Middle Ages could only suggest that they believed this was the way to finish off the whole Bangali nation. However, in the face of the resistance by the freedom loving people of Bangladesh, that particular belief was eventually shaken to its core.

Around the end of April, I was sent to the Cantonment Military Hospital in Dhaka by air. But I think the authority had already decided that since I was a “traitor”, I did not deserve proper treatment. I was not admitted to a hospital ward, but sent to a tent in the middle of a field. No doctors ever visited the tent, instead it was the army officers who were posted there that came regularly. They did not visit to ask about my recovery; they would come to threaten me and scream obscenities. Sometimes, an officer would wake me up in the middle of the night and intimidate me by saying that he would return the next night to kill me. It goes without saying that these were like a series of painful nightmares to me.

At that time I was unable to walk, neither could I even stand up. Under such circumstances, about two weeks later, I was taken to the Field Interrogation Center (FIC) on a stretcher. I was a prisoner straight from the battlefield. So I was quite a valuable catch for them. Apparently I was the only prisoner captured from the front-lines of the Liberation War at that time. Hence, whatever information they could get out of me during interrogation would turn out to be extremely valuable for them.

Although the physical torment was less during the interrogation, I was not allowed to sleep night after night. They told me to write a detailed statement of our mutiny on the night of March 25 and 26. I wrote down the complete description of my participation in the war up to my capture in Chittagong on April 11. A few senior officers of the Pakistani Army used to visit me during this time. There was one common aspect to all their attitudes—a deep hatred towards the people of our country.

One of them, a senior Brigadier, even said, “We’ll kill all Bangali men, and keep only the women alive to enjoy them ourselves.”

Such was their arrogance and hatred for us. But in a few months’ time, that arrogance would crumble to dust through a crushing defeat at the hands of those same Bangalis.

After the interrogation, I was transferred to the [cantonment](#) † prison camp. This camp was actually an abandoned armory. This place had already achieved a certain notoriety by then for the unspeakable physical torture inflicted there and the starvation of the prisoners. Many of the people who were brought there and tortured mercilessly had no direct relation with the war whatsoever in reality. However, capturing and torturing the innocent was the daily routine for the Pakistanis. Even I, who lay on a stretcher and could not even get up, was not spared from their brutalities. All they had was a loathing and frustration, something that was borne out of the failure to extinguish the desire for freedom burning in the hearts of every Bangali.

Months went by. Every new prisoner brought in would undergo the same torture routine. Some would die. Those of us that had somehow survived the torture could guess the brutalities of the German and Japanese torture camps during the Second World War. It seemed as if that terrible Fascism had reared its head again in Bangladesh twenty five years after the Second World War.

In early August, the officer ranked prisoners from the armed forces were transferred to the then 'second capital'. The conditions there were a little better, the food was relatively good too. They allowed the prisoners to have home-cooked food, even occasional visits from their relatives. The physical tortures occurring at the cantonment stopped as well. But since we did not know what the future held for us, we were not spared from the mental anguish.

At the end of August, I was transferred to another building. The authorities told me that they wanted to discuss something important with me. I was still on a stretcher then and could not walk.

Actually they wanted to cut a deal with me. Major Farooqi from the Intelligence Branch told me that I had to give a detailed statement saying that [Sheikh Mujibur Rahman](#) †, with the aid of Major Ziaur Rahman had concocted a conspiracy with India long before March 26 and that they had sent word to the Indian government to disrupt communications and isolate East Pakistan from West Pakistan. Also I had to say that these messages were sent by the 8th [East Bengal Regiment](#) † of Chittagong, of which Major Zia was the Second Commanding Officer. Since I was the Adjutant of the 8th East Bengal Regiment, they wanted me to confess that I had known all about this and that there was no doubt such was the case. As a reward for my cooperation, the Pakistanis would set me free and let me go home.

When I asked Major Farooqi, "Why would I give this false statement?" he replied, "We need this to justify our actions."

This proves beyond question that the massacre they had perpetrated was as ill-sighted as it was unconscionable.

Major Farooqi gave me three days to make up my mind and also expressed his hope that I would cooperate with them. But when he returned three days later I said, "I'm sorry, but I cannot do this. It's not possible for me to testify as the key witness." He asked me why not and I replied, "First of all, what you want me to say is not the truth. Secondly, I do not know Sheikh Mujib personally. I cannot speak about someone whom I don't know."

Major Farooqi warned me about the consequences of not helping them; he also threatened me that I was guaranteed to be hanged if I were to be tried. I told him that I had prepared myself for death since March 26. I should have died on April 11, the day I was injured. I was lucky to have endured and lived that long. At the end I said to him, "Death cannot scare me."

I was taken back to the prison that very day. The next day, September 1, 1971, a Pak Major served me a charge sheet with six different charges against me. Each of those accusations carried the maximum punishment of the death penalty. This charge sheet was my 'reward' for not helping them with their false statement.

CHARGE SHEET

Dacca

Case No.

The accused R/O PA-11531 Lt. Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, EX 8 EBR

1st Charge Abetting in inciting mutiny/seducing others from allegiance to Govt. See 131 PPC/MLR 19	Tentative Charges Abetting mutiny amongst 8 East Bengal/Seduction from allegiance to Govt. in that, he, at Chittagong on or about 26 Mar 71, abetted with Major Ziaur Rahman of the same regiment in inciting mutiny amongst the 8 East Bengal regiment. He took oath of allegiance to Maj. Ziaur Rahman in order to fight for the cause of so-called Bangladesh.
2nd Charge Waging War against, the Govt. See 121 PPC	Waging War against the Govt. of Pakistan, in that, he at Chittagong, during Mar-Apr 71 in connivance of Maj. Ziaur Rahman waged war against the Govt. of Pakistan.
3rd Charge Attacking/Resisting the armed forces of Pakistan. MLR-12	Resisting the Armed Forces of Pakistan. in that, he, at Kalurghat, on 11 Apr, 71 resisted the Armed Forces of Pakistan, a Coy of 25 FF Regt. by firing at them along with his rebel force.
4th Charge Abetment in killing 108/302 PPC	Abetment of Commit murder in that, he, on or about 11.4.1971 at Chittagong ordered his company platoon to kill Biharies in Chawk Bazar area as a result of which 20 Biharies were killed at Chawk Bazar and two Pathan at Kalurghat.
5th Charge MLR-7	Helping recalcitrant by any act designed to give assistance to the operation of the recalcitrant or to impede the operation of the Pak Force, in that, he, at Chittagong on or about 11 Apr 1971 laid defensive positions astride Kalurghat in order to impede the operation of the Armed Forces of Pak.
	Resisting or attacking Armed Forces of Pakistan, in that, (a) he, on or about 11 Apr 71 astride Kalurghat along

6th Charge MLR-12	with his company resisted and fired upon a company of 25 FFR (b) On 29 Mar 71 he ordered his Mor to carry out mortar shelling at Circuit House where Armed Forces of Pakistan were camping. (c) On 7th Apr. 71 he at Kalurghat rocket a Cinema house with 83mm Bld which occupied by the Armed Forces, killing eight.
Place Dacca Date 1, Sep, 71	Maj Mohammad Jahangir Staff Officer HQ MLA Zone 'B' Ch.

When the charge sheet was handed to me, I laughed out loud. The officer gave me a puzzled look and asked me what was so funny. I replied, "See, the first charge is 'Mutiny'. That's enough for a death sentence; no need for the other charges at all. Besides, you can't hang me six times over now, can you?" I knew that if I were to be court martialed, I was going to get the death penalty. If they believed me to be a traitor, the gallows could be my only end. But somehow I believed that I would live to tell this tale. I cannot explain why I thought that I would survive; the situation clearly was not in my favor. But I still felt that I would live through it all and breathe the air as the citizen of an independent Bangladesh.

I was sent to a solitary cell on November 28 because of my defiant public cry of '[Joy Bangla](#)' † in my cell. This was to be in preparation for the upcoming trial. The brutal torture I was subjected to there was quite impossible to envision even in my wildest nightmares. As I could not walk, I had to crawl towards the food that was left near the door. I begged the officer in charge of me to allow a fellow prisoner help me get the food, but that was to no avail. Their objective was to make my life a hell in any way possible. They refused to acknowledge that I was a cripple; that I could not take care of myself. Under such conditions, I was told that my trial would be held in the first week of December. But that day never came. All-out war broke out between the Indian and the Pakistani forces on December 4. That same day, I was transferred from the solitary confinement to the regular cell. Our liberation war had intensified by then, but the Pakistani soldiers around us used to claim, "We are winning. We will win soon." However, our hearts said that their doom was at hand. Still, it was a very tense and uncertain time for us, because the Pak soldiers could have considered us liabilities and decided to finish us off at any moment.

The Indian Air Force struck the building we were held captive in on the December 9. As the building erupted in flames, three Pakistani soldiers were burned to death. When two Pak officers came to our cell and ordered us to get out and line up in the field, we knew for sure that our time was up. But we were mistaken. They crammed us all on a truck and took us back to the old prison camp in the cantonment. We grew restless in anticipation of the long-awaited victory over the Pakistani occupation army, which surely was around the corner because of the united attack by our fearless [Mukti Bahini](#) † and the [Allied Forces](#) †. But we were also fearing that the Pakistanis could kill all the prisoners.

All our uncertainty, dread, and suffering came to an end on December 16, 1971. On that day, the Pakistani Army unequivocally and shamefully surrendered to our fearless Mukti Bahini and our Allies, the Indian Army. The prison commander himself informed me about the surrender. The arrogance of the Pakistanis was crushed; an independent country was born on the map of the world—Bangladesh, a land of freedom and liberty. Even so, I spent the next twenty four hours in terrible anguish and worry with my fellow prisoners because the prison authority did not release us that day. There was a strange blend of emotions we felt that night—a great excitement and joy because we knew we were independent, and a terrible dread that the Pakistani soldiers could kill us any moment.

Actually the Pakistanis were concerned with their own safety at that point, so they did not bother with us. But we did not know of their plans; so we were worried throughout the night. On December 17, as I stepped out as a freeman, I felt the rush of freedom spread across the horizon ready to embrace me as if it had been waiting for me all along. True, I could not walk out on my own feet; two of my cellmates carried me outside, but it did not matter then.

Independent at last! All my pain and suffering seemed to have melted away.

□ Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury was commissioned in the erstwhile Pakistan Army in 1969. He served in Jessore and Chittagong during his career with the Pakistan Army. He then actively participated in the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971 and, for his bravery, was awarded the Gallantry Award 'Bir Bikram'. He served as the Foreign Secretary of Ministry of Foreign Affairs from October 2001 to March 2005. He also served as the High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Sri Lanka, as Ambassador of Bangladesh to Germany, Vietnam, and the United States before retiring.

□ *Sindhi* The people and language of the Pakistani province Sindh.

The Days of Slavery

Nazim Mahmud

Theater artist and cultural organizer; Deputy Registrar, [University of Rajshahi](#) †, Rajshahi

Ask them to shoot you right in the middle of your forehead," I looked up into the eyes of the speaker who prescribed such an advice. "That'll be a painless death, absolutely painless," said Dr. Syed Sajjad Hussain, my professor at the [University of Dhaka](#) †. Incidentally, he was the Vice Chancellor (VC) of the [University of Rajshahi](#) † at that time and I was a staff member there. So, he could crack a joke in front of me, even if it was about as serious a matter as life and

death.

In the eyes of the Pakistani occupying forces, I was a person of dubious character, a suspect. My bank account had been frozen and I had been summoned to the office of the Colonel in the Juberi Guest House. Under these circumstances, I asked to meet with the VC to ask for his help, to consult with him on the situation, and such was the advice!

According to them, my 'crime' was undoubtedly quite severe. Dr. Hussain had taken an initiative to introduce Bangla as the official language in the university administration from [February 21](#), 1971†. This had been announced in a press conference and was highly acclaimed by the national newspapers. I was accused by the Pakistani authority of being a part of the 'think tank' behind this; it was alleged that my 'evil' advice and enthusiasm had brought it to fruition. Hence I was blacklisted. The particular list of miscreants responsible for this, as issued by the VC, was found after liberation. It was published on pages 3 and 5 of The Bangladesh Observer on January 15, 1972. The Observer made another short report on this on February 6, 1972 and The Daily Azad also mentioned this briefly on February 7, 1972. There were the names of thirty five teachers and two officers listed for punishment, arranged into four categories according to the severity of their crimes. Among them only one was stupid enough to willingly return to the then prison camp, the University of Rajshahi - me! But how did that happen? My teacher, Vice Chancellor Dr. Syed Sajjad Hussain had uttered unreserved praises for the Pakistani [Jawans](#) † in a speech broadcasted from the Rajshahi Radio station on April 17 or 18, 1971. He also described how life had returned to normal with the wonderful aid of the soldiers and assured that most of the officers and teachers who had left the campus had also returned. After such assurances, I had decided not to cross the border. I returned from a village near the border on April 21.

Our tom-tom* had come to a halt at the Sardah-Baneshwar cross-road. We faced a long convoy of about seventy military cars. I was traveling with my wife and children, and a sister-in-law who was a university student then. Her skin-tone was fairer than an average Bangali and perhaps that got the attention of the soldiers in the vehicles. The soldiers kept eyeing her from their vehicles and some even passed indecent remarks from behind the wheels. Even then, I stood on the tom-tom, hung a broad grin on my face, and kept saluting the cars as they passed us by. My wife was a brave lady. She objected to my slave like attitude. But there was only one thought in my mind: We have to survive! We must escape death and spare ourselves the nightmare of witnessing rape.

During those terrifying days of 1971, I was often worried about my wife's 'bravery'. Early on the morning of [March 25](#) †, there was a commotion outside our building. From the veranda of the first floor, I saw a soldier standing in front of the building pointing a rifle at the black flag* on the roof. He was ordering us to take it down immediately and my wife was having a heated argument with him. We hadn't yet heard the audacious speech of [Yahya Khan](#) † on the radio, and we didn't know that the lifeless body of the guard Abdur Razzak was still lying on the stairs of the Administration Building. In the nine months of Liberation War, we faced death over and over again and during those terrifying moments the courage of my wife astonished me every time. One day in November, a group of soldiers raided my in-laws' house in the Kalabagan area of the city. They said informants had reported that there were firearms hidden in the house. One of them pushed me back with the barrel of his gun and kept threatening me, "Where are the pistols and the bombs? Show us now, or else..." Another snatched away the tea-cup from my youngest sister-in-law's hand and smashed it while someone else broke open the chest and started going through the gold jewelry and money. That's when my wife said sturdily, "Take the arms if you find any, but you can't take the money or ornaments. If you do, I will report you to the Colonel."

Who knows why, but they decided to leave us alone that day. We decided to move from that house and accepted the invitation of one of my relatives and his wife, a foreigner, to be their guests and stay out of the picture for a while. An interesting incident occurred the very evening that we returned to the Kalabagan house. A group of [Punjabis](#) † in plain clothes came by a taxi. As soon as they entered, they secretly hid some pencil like long cartridges under the mattress of a bed in the first room. Then they started searching the other rooms of the house. My wife found out about their scam and while they searched the rest of our home she secretly removed the cartridges and threw them over the boundary wall of the house. The rest of us were unaware of all this. The Jawans started acting like animals when they found out that their scheme had failed. Since my wife had entered that room once, she was their prime suspect. They bullied and accused her, "What was in that room? Where did you hide everything?" etc. My wife did not admit to anything. At one point, she became mad and in broken Urdu accused them of being fakes instead. She charged them saying, "This is a bogus search, you have come with a design to loot," and finally threatened them, "Wait and I'll telephone the Colonel and then you'll see." The truth was: we knew no Colonel! As soon as she finished threatening, one of the soldiers jumped out into the courtyard and pointed his gun at us. My in-laws, three brothers-in-law, and three sisters-in-law, my son and daughter, my wife and I, we were all standing at gunpoint that day.

But let's get back to that story of returning to Rajshahi again. After the long convoy of army vehicles crossed us, we finally began moving. But we had to halt again at the Belpukuria railcrossing. A train full of awans was going to Sardah. Oh, how they roared!

The signs of the 'excellence' shown by the Pakistani army as they progressed towards Rajshahi a week before us still remained visible on both sides of the highway—burnt homes at places, vultures at rotting corpses. I still didn't know that Shaheb Bazaar had been completely burnt to ashes, my own house had been looted, or that Professor Habibur Rahman* and Professor Sukharanjan Samaddar* had already been killed. I was yet unaware that the dead bodies of Yusuf and Afzal, peons of the VC office were stenching in the university campus quarter P-12/D. Or that Dr. Abu Hena Mustafa Kamal* from the department of Bangla, Mujibar Rahman* of Mathematics and Dr. Kazi Saleh Ahmed of Statistics were captives at the Pak Army camp in the university and awaiting tortures. Perhaps I returned to the campus only as a proof to the saying "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread".

The University of Rajshahi had been turned into a large [cantonment](#) †. The dormitories, arts and science buildings, Juberi Guest House, and even some of the residential quarters of the campus were teeming with men in Khakis. They were freely roaming around the campus with loaded firearms, making bonfires with the uprooted fences from the private gardens of the teachers' residences, feasting on the poultry and livestock taken forcefully from the people living on campus or in the surrounding villages.

When I went to report at the VC office after entering the campus, I met a grade 3 (lower staff rank) staff with his entire family, seeking refuge there. They had suffered unbearable tumult the previous night. I was not supposed to know, but somehow it came to my ears that his wife and his daughter who was but a child were both raped. Vice Chancellor Dr. Hussain took me aside and said to me privately, "You are the third man to know it." He warned me not to mention this to others, "If you tell anyone that our Jawans are involved in such heinous acts, remember that I won't be able to save you."

That same evening I was ordered by the VC to arrange a program to celebrate the birth anniversary of the great poet Iqbal*. I laugh at the very thought of that remembrance now—how could anyone celebrate a poet's birthday under such circumstances! But at the time, I was only worried about my family's survival and hoped that the poet's birthday celebrations might make them spare me. About ten professors and four

army officials were present at the program that was arranged in the

lounge of the VC's house. Every conversation that took place in that room was either in English or in Urdu. Bangla was prohibited.

During Maghrib (evening) prayers, all the professors prayed like religious Muslims. The army officers, however, lounged on the sofa to smoke and chitchat while the VC kept them company. I loitered around the garden during the break, absorbed in my own thoughts, when suddenly one of my colleagues' voice startled me. He said, "You seem very worried about dying. Let me ask you then, is death itself really any worse than the way you are living now?" Those words struck a chord with me and suddenly the true nature of that life had become clear to me. That night of April 21, 1971, the University of Rajshahi trembled with the sound of dynamite blasts. The next morning we found the Shaheed Minar* in front of the Arts Building in a pile of rubble. I stopped momentarily at the place on the way to the office.

With the hope of seeing the same Shaheed Minar proudly rising to the sky someday again, our days of slavery resumed.

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- *Black flag* Refer to the entry in the second narrative 'I Was at Jagannath Hall.'
 - *Muhammad Iqbal (Allama Iqbal)* Iqbal is considered as one of the most important figures in Urdu literature. He was a philosopher, poet, and politician. His birthday is celebrated as a public holiday in Pakistan.
 - *Shaheed Minar* This is not the [Shaheed Minar](#) † in Dhaka. In most prominent cities and educational institutions, local monuments were set up to honor the [1952 Language Movement](#) †.
 - *Tom-tom* A horse carriage pulled by one horse. A traditional and popular transport in and around Rajshahi city.
 - *Habibur Rahman, Sukhararjan Samaddar, Abu Hena Mustafa Kamal, Mujibar Rahman* Refer to [University of Rajshahi](#) †.

How Can I Forget?

Lutfur Rahman

Service Holder, B.R.B. Cables, Kushtia

still cannot forget Aftab, Mokbul, or the fisherman Fotik; how tragically they sacrificed their lives for freedom. And Khoka [bhai](#) †! You died slowly in front of my eyes, and there was nothing I could do. How can I forget?

Our village home is not so far from Kushtia town. During April 1971, many of us gathered in the village to flee from the tyranny by Pak forces and non-Bengalis. We did not dare to return to the town. My elder paternal cousin, Khoka bhai, would use different ways to get into Kushtia town; he was the one who provided us with the necessary supplies from there. His non-Bengali classmates from his school days assured him that he could go to town without any fear; no harm would come. At that time, Kushtia was under the dominance of the brutal non-Bengalis. They were the law. Any able-bodied adult or young man was not spared and would be dragged to the [Boddho-bhumi](#) † (killing ground) by whatever means necessary.

On the very day we fled, the Pakistani military attacked the town. They looted, bombed, and burned down the houses and shops of Bangalis, bringing the town to ruins. I wanted to see that devastated state of my beloved town. Hence I requested Khoka bhai to take me to the town with him. At first he declined, he even tried to scare me. In the end he gave in, but on one condition: nobody at home was to know about it.

The next day, as agreed, I went with Khoka bhai without telling anyone. As soon as we entered the city, I was astonished. The buildings lay in ruins from the bombing—as if a scene from a war movie. Shyamol's beautiful house was nothing but a pile of rubble. Arzu's house was burnt down. The jujube fruit orchard was gone. In its place, a herd of goat was wandering by a heap of dung.

Upon entering the main bazaar, we noticed that the non-Bengali youths were carrying rifles. There were a lot of Pakistani soldiers there. The handful of Bangalis who were there seemed frightened, stiffly going about their tasks, without looking around; not a sound or smile on their face. Khoka bhai had a shop at the village bazaar and he needed to come to Kushtia weekly for supplies. When we were buying supplies from a shop, a non-Bengali young man came and stood beside Khoka bhai. He had a rifle on his shoulder. Khoka bhai turned to his side and said, "Oh! Aslam bhai, how are you?" The non-Bengali person nodded his head and replied in Urdu, "Yeah bhai! Do you have a cigarette?" As Khoka bhai pulled out a cigarette from his pocket a bundle of 100 Rupee notes with the Jinnah emblem was visible in his pocket. The man took the cigarette and looked at Khoka bhai's face once, then he left without a word. I noticed the greedy look in his eyes. At the same time I felt a chill go down my spine.

Upon finishing at the butcher's, we headed over to Nabi Baksh's shop. Suddenly 4 non-Bengali men and a Pak soldier stopped us on our path. A boy of eight or ten pointed out Khoka bhai and said in Urdu, "*Ye aadmi mera Rupiya le lia* This man took my money."

The Pak soldier came in front of Khoka bhai and asked in an angry voice "*Ye gaddar aadmi kitna Rupiya ke note lia*... How much money did this traitor take from you?" Instantaneously the boy answered, as if he already knew what was going to be asked, "A hundred Rupee note." Before we could reply, the Pak soldier reached into Khoka bhai's pocket and pulled out the money. Seeing the notes the boy screamed, "*Yehi mera Rupiya hain* ... That's my money!"

Immediately, the rifle butt hit Khoka bhai's back with great ferocity... and I took a boot to my belly before flipping over near the drain. When I regained consciousness, I saw Khoka bhai jolting my hand. Slowly, I got up holding his hand. They had taken our bicycle. We took a rickshaw to Doctor Akbar's dispensary at Station Road. Incensed about the physical assault and the loss of money, Khoka bhai started screaming frantically as soon as he got down from the rickshaw, "Army and [Biharis](#) † have snatched away my money and cycle. Now I will go to the Major at the court building." This attracted a crowd. A shadow of terror crossed the faces of the Bangalis, some of them we knew, some we didn't. If the Biharis came to know of this show of courage and defiance from the Bangalis they would have probably killed and dumped us right there on the main road. Someone from the crowd held Khoka bhai's hand and said, "What is done is done, please go home now. You do not need to go to the Major." However Khoka bhai was determined to report the incident to the Major.

The fear of the people was about to come true. All the commotion drew a Bihari's attention. Before [March 25](#) †, this man was a barber

who worked on the footpath. But he did not bear any resemblance to those days, instead now he looked like a probable City Council member in clean clothes. He asked, “What’s with all the noise?” Khoka bhai informed him of the earlier incident. He was a former acquaintance, named Hanif.

After hearing everything, Hanif said in Urdu, “*Mera saath chalo. Dekhenge kaun Rupiya aur cycle chin lia. Hum Major ka pas jayenge...* Come with me. We will see who took your money and cycle. We will go to the Major.”

Without thinking of the consequences, Khoka bhai decided to go with him. As much as I disliked the idea, I could not let Khoka bhai go with him alone. So I followed them. The people from the crowd tried to stop us through hints and gestures. However Khoka bhai seemed to have lost his senses. He firmly believed that his former acquaintance could get his money and cycle back. The Bihari glanced at me once and then started walking while describing what he would discuss with the Major. We headed towards Roxy Lane from the main road. Hanif held Khoka bhai’s hand and said, “*Chalo e gali ka kinare; ek mitha pan ka dukan hay, wuhase pan kharid karke khilayenge...* At the end of this lane, there is sweet betel leaf* stall, let me treat you there before going to the major.”

I felt my body quiver with fear as soon as we entered Roxy Lane: it was known as the Bangali Killing Zone. Any Bangali who knew about this place would not dare to come. But Khoka bhai was not in the right state of mind. We walked towards the end of the lane and halted before the betel leaf stall. The Garai River flowing some 200 yards from there was filled to the brim due to the monsoon. Just as Khoka bhai put the betel leaf in his mouth, he found himself surrounded by three non-Bengalis armed with sharp weapons. I quickly hid behind the stall. By the time Khoka bhai realized what was happening, it was too late to escape their grasp. As a last resort he sprinted towards the river, but he fell as one of them tripped him over. The other two grabbed him by the arms and took him to the nearby alley. Khoka bhai struggled to free his hands as he begged to Hanif, “Hanif, brother, please spare my life. I don’t want anything back, just don’t kill me.”

But those atrocious, cruel, heartless butchers would not spare him. They pulled him up; his clothes were muddy. As I looked on from my hiding place, it was as though Khoka bhai gave one last lingering glance to the world with despondent eyes. The gang of executioners got to work. The first hit was on the right arm; severed from the body, it fell on the ground. Khoka bhai’s scream sliced through the air of Roxy Lane. Bathed in fresh blood, he stood there one-armed.

Hanif chuckled and said, “*Jaiye na bhai jaiye, Ek haath lekar Major ka pas jaiye ...*Come on now, let’s go to the Major with one arm.”

The second and third blows were successively on his left arm and right thigh. He fell over his face as the left hand was separated. The hyenas stopped for a moment to discuss something among themselves at this point and then with the next blow he was decapitated. Hanif kicked the detached head upside down. Then it was my turn. One of them called out, “*Arre, Woh ladka kidhar gaya...* Hey! Where did that boy go?” I realized what was about to happen to me. I had to escape by any means from these murderers—I had to survive. In the blink of an eye, I got out from behind the stall and headed straight for the Garai. Hanif yelled, “*Pakro, usko pakro ...* Get him! Don’t let him get away.”

I could hear them chasing me but I had no time to look back. I had to live, I had to escape, and I had to cross that stretch of two hundred yards before reaching the Garai. But it felt like an endless distance to the river. I felt suffocated, my feet seemed heavier. I was running for my life.

In the end, I dived into the water before they caught up to me. I remained underwater for as long as I could in one breath, swimming away as far as I could go.

□ *Sweet betel leaf* – Betel leaf or paan is the leaf of a vine that is consumed by Asians as a (bad) habit, (consider chewable tobacco). Sweet betel leaf, on the other hand, is served during wedding ceremonies and other auspicious occasions. It is merely a betel leaf served with sweet condiments.

Those Days in Prison

Kazi Ali Ashraf

*Add Lt. Col. (Retired); Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Public
Administration, People’s Republic of Bangladesh*

In 1968, I managed to get transferred from Kohat, Pakistan to Dhaka [Cantonment](#) †. I was posted at the Dhaka Supply Depot. From the Supply Depot, I was transferred to the 36 S Enat Battalion as the 2IC (Second-in-Command). Lt. Col. (Retd.) D. S. Yusuf Haider was my commander; we received our commissions together.

After the genocide started on [March 25](#) †, we were not allowed to go to the city center. We would go to the office in the morning and back to our quarters in the evening. On the way home, I would often stop by Yusuf’s house and discuss the prevalent situation.

In the meantime many army officers had arrived in Dhaka from West Pakistan. They did all the work in the office while we just pretended to work. Around April 4 or 5, Yusuf told us that Ansari asked him why he had kept the Bangali officers sitting idly and that he should send them outside the cantonment with assignments. Accordingly Yusuf ordered me to go to Rangpur and Malek to Comilla and check the supply positions. When I objected, Yusuf held my hands and said, “Brother, please go. If you don’t, Ansari is sure to arrest you.” He advised me to take the Air Force Bristol freighter going to Rangpur the next day. Later I returned with General Nawaz whom he went to Rangpur. From the plane, I saw that Rangpur town and its surrounding areas had been burnt down.

I met with Yusuf after getting back to Dhaka. After that I was assigned to oversee the supply depot in Dhaka from time to time. The officer stationed there was my 2IC. I cannot recall his name. Whenever I went there he would look at me with suspicion. He would salute me very reluctantly, sometimes not at all. One day, I went to the POL group of the depot and met a Bangali [Havildar](#) † who used to be there when I was stationed at the depot as well. As far as I remember, his name was Kashem. While taking a tour with him, I commented, “Why don’t you set fire to these oil barrels? They will neither be able to run the vehicles nor fly the planes.” I hadn’t finished saying this when I noticed the presence of the OC (Officer in Charge) there and shouted at the Havildar, “Kashem, you should do your work properly.” Then I came back to the Supply Depot.

Later Havildar Kashem was arrested and admitted that I had told him to burn the oil barrels. His statement was used against me. Around April 9 or 10, almost all of us received orders for our new postings, in West Pakistan. I was not at all interested to go to West Pakistan. If I were to die, I would rather die here (in Bangladesh).

The next day, when I went to the office I found that a new CO (Commanding Officer), a [Punjabi](#) † Colonel, had been assigned. He called on me and we had a talk. Later that day, I met Col. Ahsan; he had come from West Pakistan that very day. He was my course mate and we were in the same department. He told me, “*Suna hain Safiullah ud gaya, tumhara kya haal hain ...* I heard that Safiullah fled; what about you?” I told him, “*Main bhi ud jaunga ...* I will flee too.” He got angry after hearing this, gave me a cold stare, and told me that he is going to see Brig. Ansari. I thought he would probably report this (our conversation) to Brig. Ansari.

Around 10 or 11 p.m. when I was getting ready to head home, a staff officer informed me that I had been summoned by Brig. Ansari. I went to his office thinking that I am done for and would be detained. Late into the night, Brig. Ansari called me in. Ansari said, “Ashraf, you will be interrogated. All the Bangali officers are going through this process. You will be staying in the mess for that period. Once everything is cleared, you can resume your regular work responsibilities.” I marched out of that room to find Major Kyani waiting for me. He said, “Let’s get you to the mess.” He told me to sit in the front of the Jeep parked in front of our office while he sat in the back. The driver drove past all the mess houses and stopped the vehicle in front of a Quarter Guard and took me to a cell. As a sentry came and unlocked the gate, Major Kyani shoved me inside. He searched my pockets and took out the keys along with my Badges of Courage, Formation sign, and even the belt. Then he told that they will get bedding and clothes from my home. The sentry locked the door of the cell. I could hear gunshots and screams of people outside and was thinking I will probably also be shot soon.

When I woke up early in the morning I found some clothes, towel, a plate, and a spoon on my bed. Probably my batman, who was a Punjabi by the way, had sent these items. He also used to cook for me at home.

The next day around 10 a.m., a man wearing a dressing gown walked in front of my cell. A guard was standing behind him. I could easily recognize Col. Yasin. He was pushed into my cell. We were quite close. He said, “Ashraf, why are you so worried? See how the Vietnamese are giving their lives for freedom. At the worst, we will die too.” Seeing him in my cell and hearing his words of courage, I regained some mental strength.

On the afternoon of April 22, we came to know that we would be transferred somewhere else. They told us to be ready. Col. Yasin guessed that they would take us to the PoW (Prisoner of War) camp and he was right.

In the morning, the guard came to take us to the bathroom. We saw that they had detained many people there. They had made arrangements for a community toilet. The sentries were cursing, calling names, and sometimes abusing the detainees physically. One guy came to me and said, “*Abhi bahar jana hai ...* You have to go out now.” I put on a set of [panjabi](#) †-pajama. I was blindfolded and my hands were tied with ropes as someone guided me outside. Out of a little gap in the corner of the blindfold, I could see a little of what was going on. He took me to a Jeep and told me to get in. That person also sat in the front seat. The Jeep stopped at the Log Area S&T Battalion. My blindfold was removed and the hands were untied. They took me to the office of the 2IC and let me sit. From their conversation, I figured that they had brought me here to hand over the accounts. Normally the accounts were assigned to the 2IC; if not transferred, the current 2IC could not operate the accounts. I saw a few Bangali faces. Seeing me in that condition their faces darkened with despair. I saw Captain Malek. He had been hospitalized earlier but returned to work that very day. He was very scared speculating that he would be arrested too. After the papers were signed, the account transfer process was completed. Once again I was blindfolded and my hands were tied before they put me in a Jeep. I saw from the corner of my blindfold, they had done the same to Captain Malek. They took me to a building and locked me in a room. But they removed my blindfolds and untied my hands. I saw many tools of torture there, such as bicycle tires, chains, knives, ropes, etc., on the table. Someone told me to sit down, handed me a pencil and paper, and ordered, “Write down everything you know”. When I finished and gave him the paper, he took it to the next room. A little later he came back and started shouting and cursing, “Why did you not write what you know?” He got very angry and started beating me with the cycle-tire. When I could not take it anymore, I screamed, “*Chod do, sab kuch likhta hoon ...* Let me go. I will write down everything.”

I wrote the same thing again which he took to the next room and showed it to someone. He came back, started to beat me again, and this time ordered me to lie flat on the floor. When I complied, he kicked me with his boots and trampled over my head and body. They were angry because I had not written about the conversation about starting a fire in the Depot. I could not bear the torture anymore. So I told them, “Yes, I went to the [Awami League](#) † office, I met with [Sheikh Mujib](#) †, I also met with [Colonel Osmani](#) †.” He wrote this information down himself and took it to the other room where I was summoned shortly after. Since I was unable to write myself, one officer asked me if what was written on the paper was true. I answered, “No they are not true, I did not meet or communicate with anyone.” On hearing my reply, he fell quiet for a moment before he ordered the [Subedar](#) † in Urdu, “Take him to the camp.” He took me to the camp blindfolded and with my hands tied. This time I was taken to another room. There, I saw my bedding and other belongings being searched by a guard. On seeing me, he gave me a kick and hit me in the guts with the rifle stock. I moved to the side to escape the hit, so it didn’t hit me with full force. If it had, I would have probably passed out then and there.

I met many people in the morning on the way to the toilet. I think they had approximately three hundred and fifty prisoners there. Each and every one of them was tortured. Some prisoners were made to clean the area while being kicked around. I saw army officers in other rooms as well. Every day they would bring in new people and take some away. For food, we would get a mug of tea in the morning. At lunch and dinner, we would get some poor quality bread, some lentil, or vegetable. For a few days, I was alone in a room. Then Flying Officer Hossain was brought to my room. It was unbearable to be all alone in the room. When Hossain was brought in, he was still in his uniform. He was very scared and devastated. I tried to console him. But seeing my condition and the wounds in my body, he was not assured at all.

A few days later, Mr. Lokman Hossain and Mr. Maksud Ali Khan were brought to our room. They were arrested on the suspicion that they were using telecommunication to provide information to Awami League personnel regarding the movements of the Pakistan Army. One day, they brought in Captain Bashar to my room. He had made some very ‘wrong’ decisions and that cost him his life. He was working in the Chittagong Supply Depot. After [March 26](#) †, he fled to Chittagong city. He was listed and announced as a freedom fighter. But when [Tikka Khan](#) † declared a general clemency, he joined the Chittagong formation and was immediately arrested and transferred to Dhaka. We whispered to him that he had made a great mistake. Anyway, he was taken to the interrogation center. He did not return for a number of days. Later I came to know from a sentry that they had killed him. One day, suddenly they took me away in a Jeep, blindfolded and hands tied. It was not far from the camp. They took me to a barrack and removed the blindfolds. There was a lot of torture equipment there. Chains were hanging from two walls. The

person who had brought me there commanded me, “*Gadder, jo kuch kiya hai, batao ...* Traitor! Tell us all that you have done!” I said, “*Main kuch nahin kiya. Main to daftar mein kam kar raha tha ...* I haven’t done anything; I was just working in the office.” He started beating me with the bicycle tire strip. When I did not admit anything, they stripped me naked and tied my hands with the chains hanging from the wall. Then he started beating me again. It felt like my whole body was being smashed; chains dug into my wrists which had started to bleed. When I could not take it anymore, I said, “Let me go, I will tell you everything.” They unchained my hands and let me put on my clothes. They sat me up on a chair and gave me some water to drink. I was under a lot of pain but I uttered the same statement again. Probably this time they believed it a little and said, “Well! We will let you go today but will bring you back again.” I was then blindfolded once again and taken back to the camp in a Jeep.

Then one day, I saw them bring Captain Talukdar in. He was in Sarishabari on vacation. When the Liberation War started, he joined in Dhaka after spending some time at home. The Pakistanis suspected that he had joined the Liberation War. He is a Brigadier and the Director General of the President’s Secretariat at present (*The narrator refers to the period of original book’s publication – Editor*). Then they brought in Mr. Yusuf, the [D.C.](#) †. (Deputy Commissioner) of Faridpur and the S.P. (Superintendent of Police). Captain Aziz was also brought to our room. Major Abdullah was brought in too but he was put in another nearby room. One night, two sentries unlocked the door and entered the room. Although there were instructions not to enter any room at night, they came in and started beating us up. They kicked Mr. Yusuf and hit him with the rifle stock. We were military trained, so it was not easy to beat us down but Mr. Yusuf could not handle it and lost consciousness a few times. The torture continued on us for a while before the sentries left the room locking the doors behind them. By morning, we were all in a terrible shape from the beating but Mr. Yusuf could not even get up from his bed. He had blood clots around his eyes and possibly fractured bones. When the [Subedar](#) † came in the morning and was notified of the incident, he acted surprised and told us that he would take action against the sentries. A doctor came by and checked Mr. Yusuf to declare that there were no fractures or damage and no medication was necessary!

One day, we heard rumors that A. K. Shamsuddin, the SDO (Sub Divisional Officer) of Sirajganj in Pabna District had been beaten to death inside the camp. He was Shafiul Azam’s brother-in-law. Shafiul had assured him by Tikka Khan’s authority that it was safe to join back at work. But as soon as he joined, he was arrested and later killed. They arrested Mr. Mohiuddin, MP (Member of the Parliament), as well. They tortured him so much that we were shocked to see him when he was brought in our room. He was pale as if drained of blood. We were surprised that they hadn’t killed him yet. Captain Altaf (at present the Transport Commissioner ...*The period of original books publication – Editor*) was also brought in. They kept Captain Abdul Malek Bhuiyan in the interrogation cell for many days and had him sign a statement of their preference before bringing him to the camp. He had narrowly escaped the clutches of death. Captain Huda was killed right before him. When we saw Malek, he was nearly bloodless and there was exudate oozing from the wounds all over his body. There were many more whose names I cannot recall. I remember Squadron Leader Manzur, Flight Lt. Khalil, Captain Golam Rahman (now a Colonel ...*The period of original books publication – Editor*) among many.

The sentries or someone else would come into our cell and torture us on a regular basis. Once we were tortured seven times in a single day. We learned later that whenever many Pakistani soldiers died in any operation, they would avenge it by torturing us more. They had lost twelve or thirteen Pakistani soldiers in Faridpur the day before they tortured us seven times. A few days later, I was blindfolded and taken in a Jeep to a location quite far away. I presumed it to be Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. When the Jeep stopped, I was seated on the floor. I was thinking maybe there is no going back to the camp this time. I had heard that this was the most vicious interrogation center. This is where Captain Bashar was killed. With my eyes blindfolded, I was reciting Dua Yunus (prayer for safety from danger) repeatedly. I could hear many people walking by. Whoever passed me would slap my head and yell filthy obscenities. A couple of hours passed like this before someone came and guided me to a room nearby. I saw from the corner of my eyes all sorts of tools of torture. I thought this was it. In the meantime someone came running in and told the person holding me, “*In ko idhar nahi laana, udhaar le jao ...* Don’t bring him here, take him over there.” The person took me to another room. Someone whispered into my ear that there was a witness against me, “*Aap kya karenge ...* What are you going to do?” I told him, “I want to cross examine the witness.” He said, “*Thik hai ...* Alright”. I asked him, “Are you the Subedar Saheb?” “Yes,” came the answer. He was that [Pathan](#) † Subedar who got me out of that room and told me about the witness. When the officer came in, he moved me up on a stage and took the blind folds off.

It took me a while to get adjusted to the light since I had been blindfolded so long. When my vision cleared, I saw that I was on a theater stage and there was a person beside me holding a hunter whip. The main screen was behind me. The officer asked me if I had committed this and that. I firmly answered, “No, I did not.” The officer shouted me down and said, “Confess! We have witnesses against you,” and he ordered someone to come in. I saw a person coming in but he was not even able to walk. This was Nurul Islam, a soldier who was at the Supply Depot while I was stationed there. He spoke in Urdu, “Sir, on that day I was on Quarter Guard duty when you came into the guard room and told me to revolt. You instructed us to take the weapons and shoot our way out and join the Bengal Regiment in Joydebpur.” I told him, “Nurul Islam, I told you no such thing. I told you to work properly.” He replied, “No, you did say that.”

Then another witness was called. As he walked in front of me slowly, I saw that it was Havildar Kashem. He was also in the Supply Depot and worked in the POL group. He also spoke in Urdu, “Sir, on that date you came to the POL group and told me to set fire to the depot.” I said, “Kashem I did not tell you to start a fire, rather I told you to work hard.” On that he replied, “Yes, you told me to work hard but prior to that you talked about starting a fire.” I have already described the incident. It seemed maybe the officer believed that I did not tell those things. He ordered the soldiers to take me back to the camp. It will be unfair of me not to mention Bangali Havildar Pyar Mohammad. He really was a brave soldier. He worked as a commando for a long time. He tried to start a fire in the depot but was caught. He was tortured to death. There was another brave man, Havildar Malek. They tortured him to death as well. They tried to set up these two Havildars against me and Captain Malek in a conspiracy case. They died but never uttered a word implicating us.

Most probably in July, they took seven of us officers and some soldiers to the Joydebpur palace. There, they had opened up a PoW prison. As far as I remember, the officers were Major Abdullah, Captain Talukdar, Captain Altaf, Captain Aziz, Captain Golam Mohammad and me. I cannot recall the names of the others. They kept us in a room at the back of the palace. I guess there were around four hundred people in that jail from all walks of life. Here, they did not torture us. But we were to defecate and urinate inside the room. We would have to clean the pots ourselves in the morning. After a few days they submitted charge sheets against most of us. The charge sheets were framed to make us look like heinous criminals and we were to be court martialed. Around September or October they brought us back to Dhaka and kept us in a jail in Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. There I saw many civilian officers and many professors of the [University of Dhaka](#) †.

During the month of November, they released some of us on various dates. Captain Talukdar was released first. He was sent to West Pakistan later. Then it was Captain Aziz’s turn. He took his ticket and on the way to the airport he fled and joined the Liberation War. On

November 30, they released me and took me to the Dhaka Station Headquarters.

They would interrogate me a few more times. I was supposed to go through a trial. But then the Pakistanis faced all-out war against the [Allied Forces](#) †. They were clearly under pressure and were in no shape to run a fake trial!

Rifle's Barrel to the Chest

Shamsuzzaman Khan

Essayist, Researcher, Director, [Bangla Academy](#) †

[Present: Director General, [Bangla Academy](#)]

M[arch 26](#) † was a weekend. We were relaxing at our homes in the (Bangladesh) [Agricultural University](#) † residential area completely unaware about what had happened in Dhaka the night before. Suddenly, a notice came that the Vice Chancellor, Quazi Fazlur Rahim, had requested all the teachers and staff to gather in front of the university guest house. With an anxious heart, I promptly went to the guest house. Almost everyone had arrived by then. They were chatting with each other in small groups here and there. By then, from one source or another, everyone was aware of the bloodcurdling violence that had taken place.

The Vice Chancellor started the meeting. In a short, spirited address, a speaker narrated the massacre of defenseless people in Dhaka. He also said, "From this sea of Bangali blood, a free Bangladesh has been born. Last night, [Bangabandhu](#) † has declared independence. At the dead of the night, that declaration was received at the Mymensingh Police Lines. The honorable Vice Chancellor will read the declaration now."

Quazi Fazlur Rahim stood up. He was tall, slender, and a handsome man with a bearded face. He was trembling in excitement. He read aloud the wireless message. In the message, describing the massacre of Bangalis in and around Dhaka, Bangabandhu had proclaimed the independence of Bangladesh. Up until April 22, Mymensingh was unoccupied territory. Since April 16 or 17, a yellow colored aircraft owned by the Pest Control Department had been flying leisurely over Mymensingh and its surrounding areas. That was a reconnaissance airplane. After that reconnaissance flight, one day, all of a sudden, a couple of fighter planes and helicopters flew from Dhaka and bombed and fired over Mymensingh and Gafargaon.

That sudden air strike caused severe panic everywhere. Seeking shelter, people fled to the villages. Some seriously injured people from Gafargaon were brought to the Mymensingh Hospital. As I saw the wounded, bloodstained bodies, I was gripped by a terrible fear. How could I keep my two young children safe? What about the safety of my old grandmother, my mother, my wife? My wife's youngest brother had come to inquire after us and couldn't return. Living in fear and anxiety, we would often hear the startling sound of heavy cannons and machine guns. At first, we could not understand from where or how those sounds were coming. But the sounds were closing in day by day. Therefore we took shelter at a village named Chatrapur, to the south of the university. The sounds were even louder in the village. Right about then, we came to know that the Pakistan Army were advancing on Mymensingh from at least three directions. The strongest group, however, was coming by train on the Dhaka-Mymensingh railway. Under air cover, the military train was shelling and firing on the surrounding areas while it advanced towards Mymensingh.

In that situation, terrified, we crossed the River Brahmaputra for shelter. There was little water. It was mostly filled by sandy bars. My youngest brother-in-law was taking care of my two kids. I could not figure out what to do with my 85 year old grandmother. She did not have the strength to walk across the wide river bar on her feet. I carried her in my arms with brief pauses in between. It was quite hard for both of us. At one point, she burst into tears and said, "Just kill me and bury me here. I can't take this anymore."

Fear of death always drives the urge to move forward. Thus somehow we managed to reach the village Bhagnamari on the east bank of the Brahmaputra. We got shelter at Fazlu Mia's house. Fazlu Mia vacated a large tin-shed room for our use. The room was furnished with large beds and even chairs and stools. Everyone at that house accepted us as if we were their close relatives. All the people in that village were very generous. After a couple of peaceful days at Bhagnamari, we were horrified to hear the terrible sound of cannons and mortars again. The enemy was drawing near. My colleague Alamgir Jalil had also taken shelter in that village. He told us one evening that the night before a shell had fallen very close to the house where he had taken shelter. As the Pak Army moved closer along the rail line, the shelling would intensify and it might cause severe harm. Considering this, we decided to move to more remote areas. The people who had provided us shelter at Bhagnamari arranged shelter for us at a village in Nandail.

We took shelter at the house of the Imam (cleric) of the mosque. The Imam was dark skinned, and of medium height. He had a long half-whitened beard. He welcomed us by the pond in his house. Packed a little tightly, our two families were accommodated on an elevated bamboo platform in a thatched house. The day went well in that fairly quiet village. It seemed that it would be quite difficult for the army to reach here. Therefore we went to sleep feeling quite relaxed.

At night we woke up to the commotion outside; there were sounds of running, and cries for help. At first, I was startled and confused. After getting my senses together, I noticed that the sounds were coming from quite a distance. So Mr. Jalil and I dared to open the shutter and come out of the room. Our terrified wives followed close behind. In the moonlight, we could make out some silhouettes by the pond. They were coming towards us. We got scared. As the figures reached us, they spoke, "Don't be afraid. Go back to your room. Sleep." There were three women, whom we had seen earlier that afternoon at our shelter. They told us again, "Are you scared? Don't be. It's only the Hindus' houses that are being looted." We were stunned to silence. What were they saying? How could people be so inhumane?

The three women approached our wives and tried to convince them to go back to their rooms. They told us not to worry. If, however, someone came, there were machetes in the room. They said, "Ladies, stand in front of the door with the machetes. Just whack at them." Hearing this, our wives were about to faint. We stood still like statues. Right then, we saw the Imam returning home in his tucked loincloth with the looted goods. There were a couple of others with him. The women eagerly rushed to join them.

We returned to the room realizing how horrific a place we had ended up in. The night passed through fear and terror. We had no intention of sleeping. It wasn't possible to sleep anyway, with the cries and screams of the attacked Hindus ringing in our ears. We were thinking how to get out of this hell on earth. Finally the night was over. In the morning, everything in the Imam's house seemed calm and usual. But their behavior and glances betrayed their curiosity about us—a curiosity about our reaction to the previous night's events.

As the sun rose and the day got busier, a man and a couple of women from the house came to our room. They tried to cover up last night's

shameful act by discussing random topics. They even said, “Why do you worry? You’re Muslims, what are you afraid of? Besides, you do not have much money or gold.” While this conversation was taking place, we heard that Fazlu Mia from Bhagnamari had sent a messenger to know about our situation. This almost made us cry out in joy and excitement. With some hints of the events of the previous night, we requested him to take us back on that very day.

Right after noon, Fazlu Mia arrived with ten or twelve men and took us back to Bhagnamari by a bullock cart. The men walked while the women, children, and elders were on the cart. Fazlu Mia’s men each had sticks or spears. The environment was quite chilling. Fazlu Mia usually did not travel to this region, but he had to come for us. He said, “The day you came here, maybe you noticed that two or three men were talking to me by the canal. They asked me if you had any gold or valuables with you. If you had any, they would have robbed you. I told them that you had neither gold nor money and warned them that you folks are my kin. I won’t spare anyone if anything were to happen to you. As soon as I left you in that village, I had a bad feeling that this place was not safe for you. That is why I sent a messenger to know your whereabouts in the morning.”

Our cart was moving along with loud squeaks. My daughters Kankon, Laboni and, Mr. Jalil’s daughter Jaysi and son Lotan were enjoying the journey very much, giggling continuously. We prayed to Allah that the future of these happy children be free of danger.

Adieu Nandail, a stronghold of the [Muslim League](#) †.

After this event, we felt pretty secure during the rest of our stay in Bhagnamari. There was the risk of danger but it was the same for Bhagnamari’s people and us. During those days, we felt like a part of the local populace.

On April 22, the Pak Army’s train arrived at Sutiakhali. At that time, some bombers of the Air Force were tearing through the skies over Mymensingh and the neighboring areas. The invading army could have occupied Mymensingh on the 22nd. But since the university was right next to Sutiakhali, they took their time to observe the situation before progressing with heavy artillery fire to take control over the university first and then the town on April 23.

During those two days, the barbaric Pakistani soldiers killed two university staff members. One of them was Shahjalal Hall’s common room bearer, 32 year old Akkas Ali; the other one was 60 years old Madhusudan, a staff at the Faculty of Fisheries. Akkas Ali was killed on April 22 in the middle of Sutiakhali Kalir Bazar road. While everyone was fleeing at the sound of cannon, machine gun, and mortars, Akkas Ali and a few other brave souls had made a spirited stand against the invaders. They were involved in a fight to the death. He told his companions, “Get ready, I am going to check out how close they are.” And with that Akkas Ali went forward. But he never made it back. As he reached the road, a rain of bullets from the occupiers’ machine gun perforated through Akkas Ali’s chest.

Madhusudan’s duty was to catch fish and supply feed for the fish at the Faculty of Fisheries. On April 23, he had come from his home in Keotkhali to the university only to feed the fish. By that time, the university was completely deserted. Not a single person was in sight. Suddenly came the rat-tat-tat sound as the Pak ‘braves’ hit their target unerringly. Madhusudan took his last fall to the ground. The murderous soldiers threw his dead body into the Brahmaputra.

The River Brahmaputra flows between Bhagnamari and the university. Since one has to take the road around a river bend to get there, the actual distance becomes two and a half to three miles. We could, however, get up-to-date news of the university every day. Many people from the village traveled through the university to go to town for their daily necessities. Some people from Bhagnamari also held minor posts at the university. About ten or twelve days after the enemy forces occupied Mymensingh town, we came to know that the situation was apparently calm for the time being. I decided that I might visit the campus to get a better idea of the situation. Besides we were running out of money—I had to go to the bank as well. On May 2, I went to the university campus. On the way, I met some familiar faces. A shadow of sorrow and panic loomed over everyone’s face. We made eye contact, exchanged salutations, but no one really talked. Despite the silence it seemed as if we were communicating, understanding one another. The eerie silence of the campus gave me the chills. I noticed only a couple of people here and there.

I visited the university proctor’s house. He was on campus at that time. He informed me that many had returned to campus. Afterwards, I went to the bank where I came across a few more colleagues. They also assured me that it was safe to return. Besides, the villages were not safe either. They would attack there too. In that regard the town was safer.

Around 10 a.m. on May 4, I returned to campus with my family. At noon on that very day, as I was about to have lunch, I was called on by two armed soldiers downstairs. When I saw them, I felt as if I were looking at two angels of death. There was a chilling harshness on their faces.

I went downstairs. They were standing under a small mango tree in front of our house. One was very dark skinned while the other one was quite fair. The fair one placed his rifle against my chest. Keeping a stern face he hissed at me, “*Ye saala Mujib ka bachcha. Tumhara naam keya?* ... Here’s another bastard son of [Mujib](#) †. What’s your name?” I told my name. Noticing the ‘Khan’ after my name, he spat and grimaced his face—“*Thut! Saala tu to Musolman nahi. Jay Bangla-ka bachcha...* Oh! How can you call yourself a Muslim? You are a bastard of Joy Bangla.” I felt myself hanging by a thread between life and death. It is difficult to explain that feeling. Slowly I started to feel numbness creeping all over my body. I think I heard them blaming me for not knowing Urdu well. Meanwhile the dark one told the fair one, “*Kyun baat kar raha hai. Saale ko goli maar do...* Why are you wasting your time talking to him? Just shoot him!” Placing his finger on the trigger the fair one fixed his aim. I was still trying to beg for mercy.

At that time, a train was going to Dhaka leaving Mymensingh. They looked at the train. The fair one took away his rifle from my chest. But he began to curse severely. I found a sudden hope for life. Eventually the verbal abuse stopped.

At one point the fair one cried out, “*Saala Bangali insaan nahi ...* Are these Bangalis even human?” I did not reply. The summary of what he said then was, “Bastard! Why are you staring like an idiot? You’re not human—each of you is the devil.” He pointed to the train and explained, “Look at that train. That is carrying the railway’s [Bihari](#) † staff members to Dhaka. Most of them are amputees. Some of them have been burnt. Your Joy Bangla people are responsible for their sufferings.” Saying this he again placed his rifle against my chest. I thought this time I was dead for sure. It was only a matter of moments. The dark one asked, “*Tum yahan keya karta hay...* What do you do around here?”

I replied “I am a Professor.”

The dark skinned one mocked at me, “*Professor! Lekin insaan nahi. Jao...* A professor! But not a human. Now scram!” On behalf of the university, Professor Ashraful Haque spoke to Captain Anzum regarding my experience. Anzum told the professor that after seeing Bihari people’s situation, the soldiers were enraged. It was by the grace of God that I was left unharmed.

Professor Haque was a very talented scientist. He was born in Varanasi, India. At first he taught at the [University of Dhaka](#) †, then he joined the Agricultural University. He taught here until his death. Ashraful Haque Hall at the Agricultural University is a homage to him from the students and teachers of the university. This noble non-Bengali professor helped us in many ways during those days of terror. One day, I asked him to help me with finding information about Jatin Sarker’s family. With our colleague Abdur Razzaq and me, he went to Jatin Sarker’s house. At

that time, Professor Sarker was in India, but his wife Kanan Bala Sarker and her family were in Mymensingh town. As I asked about their wellbeing she answered mournfully, “Zaman [bhai](#) †, we have converted to Muslims.” (See Kanan Sarker’s “I was Forced to Change My Religion.” – Editor) Hearing that, a deep sorrow came over me and I burst into tears.

Mr. Ashraful Haque was deeply hurt too. Before leaving, he said, “Do not worry Mrs. Sarker. Send me a message if you need any help.” Later he called the Brigadier of the Mymensingh Brigade, and that family was spared from any further torment. A few days later, around noontime, our student Hafiz came to my house accompanied by a fourteen or fifteen year old boy. The boy looked famished. He had not eaten anything since morning. I gave them something to eat. Hafiz was a freedom fighter. So was the young boy. They collected the necessary information while they were eating before heading back. I told Hafiz that it was extremely dangerous for them to come here since my house was located in the heart of the cantonment. He said, “What’s the worst that can happen, sir? Death?”

That same evening the army paid us a visit. First the doorbell rang. Then began the pounding on the door. An officer and two soldiers entered the house. They told us that they wanted to search the house. They searched every room, bathroom, store room scrupulously. Before leaving, the officer said, “Sorry to disturb you. *Khabar mila idhar Mukti aya* ... We were notified that the [Mukti](#) † have been spotted here.”

Hasan Ali, a lab attendant at the university’s Department of Entomology, was a handsome young man. Despite living in the enemy stronghold, he was assisting the freedom fighters. He used to inform the freedom fighters of the Pak Army’s movements and other information. The university’s guest house was the headquarters of the Pak Army’s Mymensingh [Sector](#) †. Suhrawardy Hall and Fazlul Haque Hall were the [cantonment](#) †. Hasan used to roam everywhere with alert eyes collecting vital information. Before the all-out attack on Mymensingh, he was assigned the task of supplying the map of the army’s positions to the freedom fighters. But he could not finish the job. He was caught by the notorious [Al-Badr](#) †, along with the map. The AlBadr handed him over to the Pakistani forces. He was tortured gruesomely. At last, on November 29, they killed him at the [Boddho-bhumi](#) † in front of the guest house and threw his corpse into the River Brahmaputra. Meanwhile Professor Ashraful Islam Bhuiyan had gone missing and Vice Chancellor Quazi Rahim had been removed from his post.

Death Sentence

Tajul Mohammad

Writer, Journalist, Agricultural Development Activist, Sylhet

I was very young then, studying in the ninth grade. But already a bunch of responsibilities had been thrust on my shoulders. In 1968, I was made the member of the [Students’ Union](#) †; most probably they had to amend the constitution to include me. Since then, I participated in almost every student movement. These included the strike against the bar on college admission of students with third division in the entrance exam, the movement to ban the book “Pakistan: Desh o Krishti” (Pakistan: Country and Culture) and the [11 Points Movement](#) †. I even had to go to jail. I played an active role in the 70’s national election. Again, on March 1, 1971, when the congregation of national legislative council was postponed indefinitely, I worked on organizing a procession against it in my hometown. When the [Chhatra Sangram Parishad](#) † (Student Resistance Council) was formed, I was elected the Chair of South Kulaura regional committee. For all these reasons, I was marked as an “anarchist” by the pimps of Pakistan.

After the Pakistani Military Junta unleashed genocide across the country on [March 25](#) †, the brave boys of Bengal would avenge some of it on March 28 in Shamsheer Nagar. The entire 31 Punjab regiment was killed along with Golam Rasool, a captain. We aided the brave sons of our soil by carrying boxes of bombshells to the Shamsheer Nagar Airport. After that, we began to lose communication with one another. Most of the team moved to India by whatever means they could manage. The [Mukti Bahini](#) † was formed. I wished to join the freedom fighters as well, but because of my young age, they did not involve me in the war directly. Instead, they appointed me as a courier. Montaj Ali, a young neighbor of mine, was my assistant in this duty.

At one point, Pakistan Army took control of the whole country. The schools and colleges were re-opened by the orders of [Yahya Khan](#) †. It was probably May 13. I was out to collect some information. I was heading for Sreemangal by the Brahman Bazaar road. Around 11 a.m., I heard students of my own school singing the Pakistani national anthem, “Pak sar zameen saad baad” (“Blessed be the sacred land”). The song infuriated me and I started walking faster. As I approached the premises, I could clearly see the Headmaster, standing below the flag-stand and pulling the rope, and the Pakistani flag with the star and the crescent was slithering up the post like a serpent. I was enraged. I forgot that I was persona non grata in that school. I felt suffocated. This song, that flag could not be celebrated in my motherland. As a child of Bengal, I could not and would not tolerate this. I lost my senses and started running. By the time I reached the front of the school, the national anthem had already ended. The students were entering the classrooms. But I did not care. I yanked the flag down, stomped on it and tore it to pieces. I could not burn it as I did not have matches. I was fuming in anger by then. I did not notice when the traitors had surrounded me, and I had no way to escape. The Headmaster dragged me to his office. Meanwhile, the convener of the [Peace Committee](#) † had arrived. I later heard that one of his daughters had passed the news to him in a hurry.

The trial started. I was accused of activities against the national integrity of Pakistan, desecration of the national flag, terrorist acts, etc. The respectable Headmaster explained to me what was going to happen. He was acting as the chief judge. He had very little time, for whatever he had to do must be done before the Pak hyenas arrived. He briefly went over the details of my “crimes”, what would be the charges of my crimes according to the Pakistan penal code and the sovereignty act, and the possible punishments accordingly, etc. Then he pronounced the verdict: ‘Death Sentence’. My emotions had faded away by then. I was standing nonchalantly. I realized that my name would be added to the list of the martyrs for independence. The Headmaster was still delivering his speech. He pronounced that the death sentence would be carried out after 4 p.m. “This pariah was once a student in my school; so the school’s reputation is also attached to this. Therefore after school hours, he will be shot to death and he will remain under the school’s special custody until that time,” he added.

The convener of the Peace Committee agreed to the decision. Later on, the Headmaster would create an opportunity for me to escape from that ‘special custody’. I fled and saved my life that day. However, 100% credit for that escape goes to my honorable headmaster, the late

Gopendra Kumar Das.

Another day there was a primary school beside our high school. Five out of six teachers of this school had left for India as refugees. The school was being run by a single teacher. I used to go to this school sometimes to collect information about the Pak Army from him. I would employ various tricks. Sometimes I would attend the classes. One day, a Pakistani agent heard about this. And there you go! He brought the [Razakars](#) † with him. First, he faced the only teacher on duty, Mr. Rabiul Haque. The Pak agent verbally abused and threatened him for harboring a ‘traitor’. The Razakars surrounded him. They wanted to take action then and there. But, I took this opportunity to jump out of the window. Passing through several houses, I got down to the paddy fields. I covered a good distance through the fields, and then hit the main road. After a four hour hike, I reached the Mukti Bahini camp at Tilabazar, India.

Both times, death was inevitable. I was only saved by my presence of mind and the wits of Mr. Gopendra Kumar Das and Mr. Rabiul Haque. It has been eighteen years (*The narrator refers to the period of original book's publication – Editor*) since Bangladesh has become independent but even today I have had to pause again and again as I write about those days. The grisly faces of that traitor and his henchmen have come back to haunt me over and over .

Subjected to the Whole Suite of Torture

Montu Khan

Reporter, The Weekly Uttaran, Dhaka

It was probably May 20, a Friday. I left my office at Eastern Banking Corporation at around 11 a.m. and went to the Chinese Consulate office at Dhanmondi Road no. 20 to brief the Chinese diplomats about the situation in the country. On my way back two army soldiers aimed rifles at me and stopped me near the Shahbag Hotel near the old [Muslim League](#) † office. They ordered me to get off my motorcycle. As soon as I got off my bike, one of them ransacked my pockets and threw all my papers on the ground; then they ordered me to pick them up again. As I was about to do so, one of them hit my back a few times with the butt of his rifle. I fell down but got up again. They asked me what my name was and what I did for a living. I showed them my bank identity card but they did not pay much heed to that. They decided to take me to the [cantonment](#) †.

At that point, they put handcuffs on me and a rope around my waist. One of them was in front of me, the other was holding the rope behind me as we went on. I saw a few soldiers chatting in a group in one place. They took me there and told something to a person. A little later, one of them brought two handmade rotis and some lentil soup on a plate. Some of them came in and started to show off their ‘skills’. A [Havildar](#) † said to them, “Let him eat first.” As I went to one unit from another there was no shortage of ‘cordial welcoming’. Sometimes I would be overwhelmed by their hospitality and fall down. They greeted me with kicks on the back and the butt every time I did so.

They paraded me around several units and barracks before eventually submitting me to a unit. I was put in a small 3 feet by 3 feet cubicle. The on duty sentry there got to work immediately. He started by showing off his skills with his boots. Then he untied the rope around my waist only to tie it back around my chest. My hands had been cuffed in the front up to this point; he tied the handcuffs behind my back too. The two ends of the rope were tied to the two walls of the sentry-room.

They made me stand with my feet together and my hands to my side with the fingers straightened out, in an ‘attention’ position. I could not see anything behind me. Then came a group of soldiers. They looked more ferocious than the other groups that had greeted me earlier. They started by grabbing my hair and shaking my head, pulling off a few strands in the process. They also pulled at my mustache and tore off some of it. At one point they tore off my pants and started a game. Three or four of them put a baton up my ass and tried to lift me up. But the ropes binding me would prevent them from lifting me up too high. Then they would let me go abruptly. But I could not fall on the ground either as the ropes would prevent that too. The ropes binding me were crushing my chest.

In the morning, they took me to the F.I.U (Field Intelligence Unit). It seemed that four or five of them were waiting for me – as soon as I reached there, they started to hit me indiscriminately. After a while, the captain came in and straight away kicked me in the back. I was kicked into one corner. I got up very slowly. He then said to me, “Why are you over there? Come closer.” Just then another captain appeared. The two of them had a conversation in [Punjabi](#) †. They instructed something to the sentry who had brought me. The sentry took me to the next room and ordered me to take off my shirt and pants. After I had obeyed, he escorted me back to the previous room. Then the captains instructed him to leave the room. As soon as the sentry left, the two captains started their interrogation—where did I work, how many Punjabis and [Biharis](#) † had I killed, how many girls had I raped, how many Bihari households and banks had I looted, to whom had I given the money, which places had I sent the loot to, and where the [Mukti Bahini](#) † were training.

They did not wait for my reply – they started their work. One of them crushed my toes with his boot as he asked me questions. But he would not wait to listen to my answers; he just smoked a cigarette and talked with the other guy. At one point, he grabbed hold of my hair and banged my head against the wall. Then he returned to his chair and started interrogating me again. But they would not believe anything I said. Even after I showed them my identity card, they would not believe that I worked in a bank! At one point, he pressed the burning cigarette against my hand and shouted, “*Saale, Bangali kutte ka bacche! Sach baat nahi batayega?*... You rascal, Bangali son of a bitch! Are you going to speak the truth or not?” Then he told me to put out my hand. As I did, he put some kind of liquid on the palm of my hand from a little bottle near his feet. I started to squirm in pain and they laughed at me. To them, it all seemed to be great fun. As the two of them departed with some final kicks and punches, they instructed some soldiers to continue the torture. Several soldiers entered the room and started to beat me up. When they left after a while, I had no strength left in me to get up. Having been kicked and trampled on all over my body, especially the chest, it felt as if all my ribs had been crushed. One of them came in, pulled me up, and told me to put on my clothes. I had nothing left in me. He kicked me twice and said, “*Keya, baat nahi sunta? Uth jaldi...* Can’t you hear? Get up quickly.” I somehow crawled to a chair and got up by leaning on it. But I was in no shape to put on my clothes. As I picked up my clothes and started to get out of the room someone said, “*Behenchod, khun nikalta hai kahan se...* Hey rascal, where are you bleeding from?” I realized that I had a deep wound above my right knee. I was bleeding from there. I had no sense or feeling till then. It was as if I started to feel the pain in my hands, ears (they had burnt my ears as well), and other parts at the same time.

They took me to another sentry room. The system was the same as before. My hands had handcuffs and chains on them. An officer came in

and asked me a couple of questions. He was a little kinder to me. My throat was dry with thirst, but I had not dared to ask for water before. Now when I did, they brought me a mug of water, two rotis, and some lentils with it. I finished the mug of water immediately and felt some relief. When they saw how I drank the water, they laughed. Then I ate the bread and the lentils. I later learnt that he was the Commanding Officer over there. He came back again and reassured me, “*Kuch daar nahi. Jo kuch puchega sach sach batane se chod dega...* Don’t be afraid. If you answer truthfully, we will let you go.” I replied, “I am a Muslim. A Muslim does not lie.” The officer chuckled and left without saying anything more. The duty shift of the sentries changed and the old one pointed to me and said, “*Ye saala behenchod Bangali, bolta hai wo musolman bhi hai...* This rascal Bangali claims to be a Muslim too.” He then came to me and said, “*Kay bhi saala tu musolman ho? Saala Bangali koi musolman hota hai...* How are you a Muslim, you rascal? Can a Bangali be a Muslim?” I spent that night without much trouble. I even slept a little leaning on the wall. But I could hardly move my hands because the chains were pulling on them.

The Commanding Officer returned in the morning and asked me if I had dinner and was there any problem. I told him I was doing quite well. The guard commander came in the afternoon and told me to go with him for a shower. I told him, “I don’t have any fresh clothes.”

“So what? Take off your clothes and put them on again after the shower. Don’t you have to pee too?”

I realized that I had not relieved myself in the last two days. As soon as I thought of that, I felt the need of it. I felt much better after I had taken the shower. Just before dusk, the Havildar whom I had met earlier returned and started to hit me without any warning. Thus another night went by. The Havildar came back once more after dusk the next day. When I saw him enter, I started to pray to God. He immediately punched me on the jaw and I tumbled on to the floor.

The beast came back the next afternoon and put me on a pickup with my hands and wrists tied behind my back, all the while punching and kicking me. The van went through a large gate and stopped at its destination. Two people came from somewhere, tied my eyes, and took me upstairs to a room where they tied me to the bars of a window. Once they had bound my hands, they untied my eyes. Then started another session of torture. I was dying of thirst, so I wanted a little water. They gave me a glass of water. I held it between my knees and tried to drink from it by bending down, but my hands were tied so tightly behind my back that I could not bend my back enough to sip properly. My whole body was shaking. I was finally able to get a few drops of water with the help of a fellow prisoner. A little later seven or eight soldiers came and beat us up with their rifle butts and kicked us around with their boots.

I wanted to urinate in the evening, so three of them took me downstairs. But I could not open the zippers of my pants. Someone unzipped for me, and then they started to examine my genitals to see if I was circumcised as a Muslim or not. They pulled on my penis and testicles and as soon as I screamed out in pain a few more blows landed on me. After urinating, I was brought back upstairs and tied to the window bars again. I thus spent two nights and one day with no food in my stomach.

After five days, they took me out and put me on a car. An officer was inside. The car passed the airport and headed towards the cantonment. It stopped in front of a house. The officer handed me to some soldiers and went inside. The men took me to a garage and after a couple of irrelevant questions asked me to take my pants off. The examination of genitals began again. One of them lit a matchstick and set fire to my pubic hair. I started to writhe in pain. That was a great amusement to them. I was spared only when an officer arrived.

One afternoon, one of them unlocked my cell and took me to another room. There were already two persons there. They told the soldier who brought me to leave the room and started to ask me questions very politely, gently touching my hand. All the questions were related to the bank. ‘How much money had been given to [Awami League](#) †, through whom, which officer sent me to meet up with which Awami League leaders’, etc. When I told them that I did not know any such matters, one of them got hold of my hair and yanked me to the floor. The other one sprang up and started to hit me indiscriminately. After a while, they took a break and told me to take off my clothes and lie face down on the floor naked. I had to do as they said. Then one of them stood up over me with a foot on my waist, the other on the back of my neck and then started to beat me with a thick rubber rod. The other one stood there with a pen and a pad and said, “*Sach batao, tumko chod dega...* Tell us the truth, and we’ll let you go.” The more I said that I did not know anything, the more intense the torture got. They asked a bunch of similar questions. “*Saala, tera bank ko Bangladesh ka state bank banane mangta...* Rascal, you want to make your bank the State Bank of Bangladesh?” They also asked how many Biharis I had killed, how many girls I had raped, how many banks and shops I had looted.

Then all of a sudden their attitude changed! They helped me sit up, gave me some tea, and some water. They told me to put on my underwear. That’s when I noticed a pool of blood on the floor, as well as on my body. But my senses were too numb to figure out where I was cut or bleeding from. They had been beating me in that pool of blood! One of them ‘apologized’ for their tortures, and said, “We did not want to torture you so much. We thought you knew a lot but weren’t saying anything. Anyway, what’s done is done, don’t take it personally. If you help us and cooperate with us a little bit, it’ll bode well for you. Now think and decide what you want to do.”

I was glad that they had taken a break and given me some time to think. Otherwise, I don’t know what would have happened if the tortures had continued for much longer; perhaps I would have agreed to anything they said. It seemed like the toughest test I had ever faced. I thought to myself that the worst that they could do to me was to kill me. I did not have much time to think. The two ‘angels of death’ reentered the room. I said a silent prayer to the Almighty, “Allah, You are the most benevolent. My family will suffer the same fate as the millions of this country. But give me the strength to withstand the torture of these beasts. What will be will be.” I don’t remember how much time went by. As I had no answer, they started their act again. All the while I was silently praying to the Lord, “Give me the strength to endure this pain.” After a while, they stopped beating me and wound some electrical wires around my body, hands, and legs. The other end was connected to a plug. As soon as they turned on the switch, my whole body jerked violently. They turned off the switch a moment later and said, “Tell us the names we want and we’ll let you go.” I could only tolerate up to three electric shocks, then on the fourth one I could not take it any more. I tumbled down on to the floor. I cannot remember anything after that. When my senses came back to me, I saw that the ‘angels of death’ were leaving and saying to themselves they would be back later at night and would surely be able to break me then.

In the evening, the C.O. (Commanding Officer) came and said something to the guard commander. The guard commander came up to me and said, “When the C.O. returns tonight you must cry a lot and beg him to let you go. Otherwise you are in deep trouble.” I was terribly upset to hear this. He had not spoken like this before. A thousand thoughts crept into my head—all of fear and dread—what would happen next? The officer arrived on time. He stood in front of me and asked me how I was doing. He had never done so before. I called on all my willpower and followed the advice of the guard commander. I clasped my hands and in a broken voice asked, “Sir, what are you to do with me?” He smiled a little and replied, “*Haan, tere baare mein kuch ho raha hai. Thik hai, Allah ko yaad kar, thora derme malum ho jayega...* Yes, something is in the works for you alright, keep praying to Allah. You’ll know soon enough.”

After a while, some soldiers came. Surprisingly they did not beat me. They did not even interrogate me. They only said, “*Keya Montu, kal*

to tu aur nahi rahega, kuch batane ka hai... What's up Montu? You are not going to be here from tomorrow. Do you have anything to say?"

I was trembling in fear—I could not reply anything. Seeing that I was not replying, they said, “*Keya sochta, sochne ka kuch nahi hai. Tera zindagi sirf aaj raat tak hai. Bol kuch bolne ka hai ke nahin...* What are you thinking about? Nothing will come from thinking. You have only this night left in your life. If you have something to say, you better say it now.” He moved my face by touching my chin while making a sound of pity with his mouth, “Go up and start with your ‘Joy Bangla’ † again.” I said to them, “Allah’s will will be done.”

One of them retorted back, “Where was your Allah all these days, you scoundrel? Now say ‘Joy Bangla’ and pray to your father [Mujib](#) †. Let him save you now.”

One by one almost five or six groups came and mocked me like this that night. Strangely, after listening to them the fear of death in me subsided to an extent. I silently thanked Allah, whatever He does He does it for the good of us. Sometime later, the C.O. came and told me to pack up my stuff. I would have to hand them over to the people from the police station once they got here. It seemed to me that may be I would not be killed but rather sent to the station. The men from the station had not arrived yet. They let me shave and take a shower with a new Lux soap. They gave me a [lungi](#) † and took my dirty blood stained shirt and pants. Within a short time, those were washed and returned to me clean. The C.O. returned again. I could not understand why he was coming so frequently that day. This time, I asked him what had been decided about me.

Smirking, he replied, “I told you a decision has been made. You’ll know shortly.”

I hardly grasped that the decision was not to set me free from my imprisonment, but from my life.

After quite some time, a police officer appeared with some policemen. They took my stuff away leaving me behind. Then it hit me—this was surely going to be my death. A long time later, a Havildar came and unlocked my chains, and then told me to pick up the chains and follow him. So I did. I had taken only a few steps when from out of nowhere, someone bound my eyes with a piece of black cloth and made me stand somewhere. I thought that this was the end and waited to be greeted by bullets soon. I could only sense the presence of others around me. Some moments passed. I can never explain what went through my mind in those seconds. But the sound of a rifle never came. Instead somebody commanded me, “*Samne me gari hai, ouasi me sawar ho jao...* There’s a car in front of you. Get in.” I could not see anything. I felt my way with my hands and got into the car. Where were they taking me to kill me? There were a few others in the car. They were annoyed. They were questioning the decision to move me to somewhere else, when they could easily finish me right there. I cannot say how long we travelled, but suddenly someone came and slapped me hard on the back of my neck, “*Saale behenchod, baach gaya...* You bastard, you got away!” and then untied my eyes.

I could not believe him. How could it be! A few minutes passed. A soldier said something in Punjabi to the one who was holding my chains. He then got me out of the car and put me on a truck. There were three others on that truck. The truck took us to another place. There, eight or ten soldiers welcomed us in their own conventional way—showing off their skills of torture. My throat was dry from thirst and I asked for some water. It had started to rain quite heavily by then. One of them told me to drink the water that was flowing down from the roof. Seeing no other alternative, that’s what I tried. My hands were bound and as soon as I opened my mouth to have a few drops of water, someone yanked on my chain and pulled me away. “*Kitna pani pita hai, Saala peshab kar dega, wohi pine hoga...* How much water is he drinking? He’s going to want to pee soon, let him drink his pee then.”

They put us back on the truck a little later. The truck stopped in front of the headquarters of the 14th Division of the Army. We were sitting on the truck with our heads down. One of the soldiers came over and sat on my shoulders and said, “This one is to get 200 hits with the rod.” And with that he started to hit me. At the same time, two others stood on my legs and ‘danced’ with their boots on. The men took turns dancing on my feet, but the ‘old man from Sinbad’ who was sitting across my shoulders and beating me would not relent. I remember counting up to sixteen before I lost consciousness. When I regained consciousness, they had left me alone. But my whole body was dry with thirst. I begged for some water but nobody cared. One of them mocked, “Yeah, we have sent for cool lemonade.” He took my hair in his hand, and slapped me hard a couple of times before spitting in my mouth and saying, “Here, drink this.” My heart and lungs felt as dry as the desert. Just then, I saw a torn mosquito net on top of the truck. Perhaps it was used to clean the truck or something like that. It was wet from the rain and was dripping water now. I dragged my buttock across towards the wet net, lifted myself up just a bit, and pulled down a corner of it and sucked it. I almost wished I could suck the whole net! But before I had a few drops, a soldier came, kicked me, and hit me with his rifle butt and said, “*Saala, bhagne ka matlab hai? Goli mar dega...* Bastard, are you trying to escape? I’ll shoot you.” It was a stupid accusation; it was impossible to escape from there. But the punishment was severe. I cannot really say for how long that went on.

My senses returned when we were told again to get off the truck. They brought us to a room without any windows. They would open the doors from time to time to let the fresh air in. There were about twenty-five of us in that room. There was no question of lying down at night—there was hardly enough space to sit with our feet stretched.

The guards changed shift every two hours. Before and after the shift changes, we would be treated to a session of beating. They all seemed to be particularly interested in me. For example, once, someone made me lie face down and held me down with his boot on my back, while someone else separated my legs, tied, and then pulled them upwards with ropes. Then they started to beat on the bare bottom of my feet with a thick stick. When I started to writhe in pain, one of them put his boot on my head and held my head down. (This resulted in blisters on the bottom of my feet a few days later and the skin came off, and twice there were blood clots. Finally when I was in Joydebpur, the skin on the bottom of my feet had to be surgically removed).

Another time, they hung me upside down—feet up and head down. I could barely balance myself on my two hands on the floor. I then felt blood filling up my mouth. I was alarmed—was this the end?

The next morning, they took us to a bunch of places, and then we reached Joydebpur [Cantonment](#) † just before evening. From then on, the situation started to get a little better. However, when I was brought back to Dhaka Cantonment, there was further torture. From there, I was shifted to Dhaka Central Jail. After almost five months in prison, I was set free as part of a general amnesty and was finally able to return home one lucky evening in the middle of October.

Murders at the Prabartak Sangha

Jaladhar Sengupta

Social Worker, Prabartak Sangha, Chittagong*

The security of the Chittagong Prabartak Sangha* was under threat from [March 26](#) †, 1971, as the brave Bangali soldiers of [EPR](#) † had made their base in the hills near the center of the Sangha. It was raining bullets. Prabartak Sangha became a battlefield. To ensure the immediate safety of the people who had taken shelter there, the larger than life leader and General Secretary of the Sangha, Birendralal Chowdhury, contacted the Headmaster of the Dholghat High School that was 20 miles away. He made sure that the women, children, elderly members, and the sick were transferred there safely. The Headmaster of the Prabartak School, Mr. Nirodbaran Chowdhury, was assigned this task. This was done on March 30, 1971. Dholghat High School was the shelter and relief center for Prabartak members. Birendralal Chowdhury did not leave his post even when danger was imminent. He sacrificed his life like the sage Dadhichi*. The Pakistani Army arrested him and took him away from the club premises to the [Boddho-bhumi](#) † (killing grounds). We lost someone truly inspirational. That was March 30. The same day, army bullets injured two other workers of the shelter in the premises of the Sangha.

Some of the senior male students and volunteers of the school had been assigned the task of distributing food and water for the EPR members on March 29. They had signed up as volunteers to aid their motherland in her fight for liberation. The army wounded a few of them. Fifty of us took the wounded to the Shakpura Prabartak shelter on the directions of Birendralal. We stayed there for almost 30 hours. The generous people and social leaders of Shakpura assisted us with medical treatment and food. We stayed in the Dholghat shelter from March 30 till May 20. Our rations ran out after twenty days, and we faced a shortage of food. We could only eat once a day and people started to get sick. Again, the generous people from Dholghat and the neighboring areas came to our rescue. Their aid helped us live through those days. It was hard for us even to imagine that Biren-[da](#) † (Birendralal Chowdhury) was no longer with us. It was during these hard times that the fatal day of May 20 came upon us. Suspecting danger, the refugees under the shelter of the Sangha left early in the morning and hid in the nearby forests for safety. Some of the male members stayed back in the shelter. The dedicated treasurer of the Sangha, Harish-da, had been bedridden for the past 10 years due to his disability. The president of the organization, the saintlike Bankim Sen, sat by Harish-da's bedside. Four of us stayed with them as well. Death was better than living if it were an honorable death.

We saw five Pak Army soldiers enter the shelter premises like angels of death. They made the five of us kneel one behind the other in the school's field. First it was Bholanath, Adwaita Roy; next Nandalal Pundit, then Jogesh Chakravarty; fourth in line was me—Jaladhar Sengupta. Finally, the fifth in line was Bankim Sen.

One of the soldiers beat us three times with a cane and told us to go to [Indira Gandhi](#) † or [Sheikh Mujib](#) †. The three Baluch* soldiers left the field, saying that they would not shoot unarmed old men. One of the two [Punjabi](#) † soldiers shot us. The first three died. As I was shot, I fell to the ground but I was still conscious and bleeding. Bankim Sen was also wounded and conscious. Two hours later, as he was given water by a female member from the Sangha, he succumbed to his injuries. Harish Rakshit started a hunger strike in protest of the death of the Sangha brothers and died 10 days later on May 30. Such was the horrific end to the great men of the Sangha on May 20, 1971. The brothers of the Sangha had come for a pilgrimage together. They left the world together as well.

Today, I survive as the lone witness to these murders. How I live by is, however, a different story.

□ *Baluch* The Baluch or Baloch native to the Balochistan region in the Iranian plateau in Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan, as well as in the Arabian Peninsula. About 50% of the Baloch live in Balochistan, a western province of Pakistan. The Baloch regiment is a prominent infantry regiment in the Pakistani army.

□ *Dadhichi* A sage from Hindu mythology.

□ *Prabartak Sangha* was founded in 1920 by Motilal Roy, a revolutionary. The Prabartak Sangha was based in West Bengal, India and had branches in Chittagong in Bangladesh. The Sangha ventured into business, ran educational institutions, and established cultural centers. The founding fathers of the original institute were followers of Brahmoism and the organization at the time of the Liberation War of Bangladesh mainly ran an orphanage to children of different religious backgrounds. The Sangha was known for its social work.

Awaiting Death

Md. Altaf Hossain

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On April 7, the Bangali members of the [EPR](#) †, the [Ansars](#) †, and the police in the border region jointly attacked the Saidpur [cantonment](#) †, the base of the enemy Pakistan Army in the north. Outgunned by the modern weaponry of the enemy, the joint attack was repelled. During the fight, an army company used tanks and artillery to enter Nilphamari town. As soon as they entered the town, they killed some innocents and youths. In fear, we went to our home in Ramnagar village some four miles away, near the Indian border. From there, my friend Dr. Manik and I went to India. When we heard about the sufferings of the people in the country, we came back to the village home to get a grasp of the situation. Upon returning, I found that government officers of different ranks, who had fled from the cities, had taken shelter in our house. My mother was overwhelmed with the responsibilities.

None of my brothers were home, so I decided to stay with my mother to help with the guests who had taken refuge.

On June 4, the Pak Army and their collaborators, the [Razakars](#) † and [Al-Badr](#)s †, raided our village home. They came to arrest two of my elder brothers, Ataullah Miah and Ahsan Ahmed (former City Council Chairman). The main reason for the raid was that my brother Ataullah Miah was a big supporter of [Awami League](#) † and my second eldest brother Ahsan was the president of [NAP \(Bhashani\)](#) †. I was awakened by the sudden barking of dogs at dawn. Still in bed, I called out to my cousin in the house behind ours in a sleepy voice, “Hamid-[da](#) †, can you please check why the dogs are barking?” But he did not give any reply. The horrifying barking would not stop. Quite annoyed, I got up and through the gap in the door saw 8 or 10 Pakistani soldiers near the front gate. Wearing raincoats and with rifles on their back, they were kicking and smashing their rifles against our front gate made of tin. They were trying to break the door open. The angry dogs had surrounded them.

When I saw this, I was afraid that if I were to wake the others there would be a commotion. So I decided not to. In order to save my life, I leapt through the window in the back into the pepper field and started to run. But that didn’t help—I couldn’t get far. Two Pakistani soldiers with Chinese rifles sprang towards me from two sides. They took me to the side of the road in the back. When I got there, I found Hamid-da, whom I had called for after hearing the dogs bark. He had actually gone out to the yard hearing my request, but he had been apprehended instantly. They had tied up his hands and mouth and brought him under a Pakur tree. They also took me there and started to interrogate me. There were some members of the collaborators, Razakars and Al-Badr, with them. They told the soldiers in bad Urdu, “*Ustad, a ladka Ataullah, Ahsan saheb ko chota bhai hai. University ka student hai...* Boss, this is the younger brother of Ataullah and Ahsan. He goes to the university.” They tried to convey to the soldiers in Urdu that I was staying at home and helping my brothers who were fighting in the Liberation War as well as exchanging detailed news and information from the city. Then one of the soldiers put a gun to my back and said, “*Chalo, andaar chalo...* Come on, let’s go inside.” Seeing no other alternative, I went with them and saw that they had already broken the gate open and entered our house. However, the women in the house had not yet realized that the soldiers had entered the yard. Some of the [Jawans](#) † started to kick on the door of the rooms.

As soon as I entered, I knocked from door to door and said, “Open the door, the military have come to our house.” When no one opened the door still, the [Subedar](#) † Major Fazal Muqem Khan kicked me in the waist and started to shout obscenities at me. When my sister-in-law realized how I was being tortured, she opened the doors. The army soldiers brought out all the inhabitants of the house into the yard and made them sit in a line. Then they started to ask, “Who did you vote for? Are you Muslims or Hindus?” The Subedar Major was asking the questions himself. The Jawans had entered the house in the meantime and started looting the place. I then saw that they had also brought the men from the other neighboring houses out into the yard. I could not find an opportunity to escape. I also realized that the Razakar, Al-Badr members Abdullah and Manzur, who knew me quite well, had convinced the Pak Army that I was a university student and was involved in student politics. Abdullah was the son of the Razakar chairman Abdul Latif, a leader of [Jamaat](#) †. He studied with me in school and university. I do not recall there being any enmity between the two of us, hence his actions were perplexing.

Finally I got a chance to flee. The soldiers were busy with looting and butchering a goat at that time. I took shelter under the barn by the well in the house. Dogs and goats lived where I took shelter. When the soldiers found me missing from the line, they started beating up the men in the yard. When their searches around the stables came to no fruit, I heard the Subedar having a go at the soldiers and Al-Badr, demanding from them how I had escaped. At one point, he accepted that I had escaped and ordered to ‘close’ everything. At this point, an unfortunate thing happened. Razakar Manzur, who was searching around the two paths by the barn, spotted me hiding behind some of the goats and the pillars. As soon as he saw me, he said to me, “*Ei behenchod, bahar aao...* You bastard, get out.” I pretended not to see or hear him. Manzur then said, “*Saala, tum aye se bahar nahi hoga. Tumko bayonet charge karna hoga...* You rascal! If you do not come out now, we’ll use the bayonet on you.” I started to come out from under the stable and said, “Alright Manzur, you don’t have to stab me with the bayonet. Let’s go where you want to take me to.” He also said, “You rogue, if we hadn’t found you in the next five minutes we would have burnt down your house. We would have harassed your mother and sisters as well.” I thought to myself that I would not let the people of my household and village suffer on my account. I suddenly had a sort of determination. I walked straight into the yard. The Subedar started to kick and hit me with the butt of his Sten gun. He interrogated me over and over but could not get any more information from me regarding my brothers other than what they knew. Furious, they started to torture me brutally again.

I can still feel the pain all over my body. Such a brutal torment it was. I was beaten all over, in every way possible—kicks, punches, the hits with barrels and the butts of the guns. Blood started to gush out of my mouth and teeth. The intensity of the beating increased and at one stage I was stripped naked. They kept pounding me. Two of the soldiers got hold of bamboo sticks and started hitting me with those. I cannot describe how devastated and ashamed I felt being tortured naked in front of all the people in the yard, including the women of the household. At one point I lost consciousness and crumbled to the ground. Despite the sound of crying of my sisters-in-law and other women coming from the kitchen, they did not stop the torture. When the Subedar and the soldiers got a little tired after they had been beating me for a while, someone was instructed to put a [lungi](#) † on me. I was half-conscious and felt someone rest my head against a chair. The Subedar sat himself on another chair and said, “*Abhi tum sach bat batlao...* Now tell the truth.” He loaded his Sten gun and put the barrel against my forehead, “Say ‘[Joy Bangla](#)’ †. ‘Joy Bangla,’ say it.” I had very little sense of what was going on, what he was saying. After a few minutes, when my senses started to come back to me, I realized he was telling me to say ‘Joy Bangla’. I could understand that if I were to say that, I would be shot instantly. I felt an urge of defiance—I would rather die than obey them. I would not say what they wanted me to say. Besides I heard a few days before that they would torture people and just before killing them, would make them say ‘Joy Bangla’. I did not utter ‘Joy Bangla’ no matter what. The Subedar started to get furious and told me, “If you say ‘Joy Bangla’, you’ll be free. We’ll let you go.” I replied in broken Urdu, “I do not want to be free. Allah will set me free. He is the true giver of freedom.” I had pointed my hand towards Heaven as I said this. It took all my strength. When he could not make me say ‘Joy Bangla’, the Subedar asked me, “*Tum azadi nahi mangta...* Don’t you want freedom?” I replied, “*Zarur mangta, tab hamara nahin. Deshka azadi mangta...* Of course I do—but not for me, for my country.”

I saw a flash of anger in the face of the Subedar. He called me a ‘kafir’ (infidel) and ordered me to say ‘Joy Bangla’ a few more times. He aimed the gun at my forehead and then shot just past it with a loud bang. The bullet grazed my hair and hit the wall of the kitchen beyond, leaving a circular mark on it. Thus he tried to scare me and said, “*Abhi Joy Bangla bolta nahi...* You are still not going to say ‘Joy Bangla’?” I replied, “No.” He thought of something and said, “*Thik hai, tum under arrest. Nilphamari camp mein jaana parega tumko...* Alright, you are under arrest. You will be taken to the Nilphamari camp.”

There was a motorcycle with flat tires beside the house that belonged to my third eldest brother. They put their loot on it—the bigger lot was put on the seat, and smaller packs on top of that. Among the loot were radio, watches, gold, jewelry, good clothing, money, camera, and stuff that had been brought by the families from the city. These were securely tied to the motorbike. The Subedar ordered me to carry them all to the

camp. I carried that 40 kg heavy load to the Nilphamari camp which was about 5 miles away. When we reached there it was 11:30 a.m. God only knows how I carried that in such a semiconscious state. I had had no breakfast yet as the raid had started early in the morning. When I left, I went to bid farewell to my sisters-in-law in the kitchen but I did not see my mother there. I had a longing to see her before I left.

The Subedar took me to the Captain of the camp and his first question to me was, “*Kiya naam hai tumhara...* What’s your name?” I replied, “Muhammad Altaf Hossain.” He became angry and shouted at me, “*Nahi, tum Hindu hai...* No, you are a Hindu.” I told him, “*Nahi sir, may musulman hu...* No sir, I am a Muslim.” He then told me, “*Thik hai, agar musulman hai to bolo - tisra kalima keya hai...* All right if you are a Muslim, what is the third *kalema* (Islamic oath)?” To tell the truth, I did not know it, so I said the first one that I knew, “*La Ilaha Illallahu Muhammadur Rasulullah* (There is only one God, and Muhammad (SM) is His prophet)”. I don’t think that the Captain knew the third one either, as he said, “All right,” and asked me, “*Tab bolo, tumhara bada bhai kidhar hai, Muktiwala kidhar hai?*... Where is your eldest brother? Where is the one who is a [Mukti](#) †?” and other questions like these. I tried to answer these in Urdu like I had done before. This resulted in more physical torture with sticks and rollers. After a while, two Jawans were called in to put me up on a table. They tied my hands to the fan with pieces of red cloth and turned on the fan switch, but it did not rotate. Thankfully the freedom fighters had blown up the Thakurgaon power station by then. In the meantime, the Subedar entered the room and said to the Captain, “Sir, we have beaten and tortured this guy quite a lot, but this kid has given the same answers.” The Captain cast a deadly glance at me hanging, and told them to untie my hands.

Then they took me from the Captain’s room to room number 8. First, they made me sit down on a wooden platform and tied my hands behind my back and bound my eyes with a red cloth. They then shoved me inside the room after unlocking the door. There were already a lot of people inside. As I was shoved in, I stumbled on someone’s foot. I heard him say out in our local dialect, “Who is it brother? You just stomped on me.” Hearing the voice I realized that it was Kader [bhai](#) †. He was the owner of the betel leaf shop and would not let Abdullah or Manzur take betel or cigarette without payment. So they had painted him as an Awami League member and had him arrested. This man was quite courageous and did not cower down at their threats. I heard a lot of familiar voices in that room. I had not eaten anything all day and felt terribly hungry. Besides, every joint in my body ached in pain from the torture and I felt feverish. I lied down on a bench and wept while praying to Allah. I remembered the days at the university, my close friends and the face of that dearest person of mine.

Thus the night went by. It was almost noon. We were each then given two rotis and some lentil soup for breakfast. After starving for the whole day and whole night, it was difficult to swallow the food. Then, like prisoners, we were taken back to room no. 8.

Meanwhile, when my elder brother learnt that I had been taken away to Nilphamari, he went into a fit at our home. He was beginning to lose his mind and kept saying, “I will surrender, they will surely set Altaf free if I surrender.” Somebody advised him to seek the help of Selim Khan and Jalal Khan from Saidpur. My elder brothers had known these two [Pathans](#) † quite well from before. My brother wrote a letter to them and sent it with a [Bihari](#) † messenger named Nehal who used to sell nuts near the cinema hall. Nehal was quite fond of my brother. My brother had helped him a lot in his times of need. Nehal went to Saidpur, met with Jalal and Selim Khan, gave them the letter and told them in detail what had happened to me. The two brothers contemplated the situation for quite a while and finally went to the cantonment and met with the Colonel, where they vouched for me. At first, the Colonel dismissed them, but in the end he cooled down and called up the Captain of the Nilphamari camp and told him, “The kid named Altaf, whom you seized from Ramnagar village in Nilphamari, don’t do anything more to him tonight.” I heard all these from Selim and Jalal Khan five or six days after my release. Of course, I had received the proof that night while I was in captivity as well. All the other young men like me were killed that night, only I was spared. They were taken to the bamboo bushes nearby and were executed. I shivered in fear and spent the night praying to God.

After the talk between the Khans and the Colonel, my hands and eyes were untied the next afternoon. I thought this must have been some good fortune. I was startled. I had been crying crumpled on that high bench. I had not slept for a minute over the previous two days. I had a terrible headache and my body was hurting all over. I was also running a high fever. I saw that there was quite a commotion among the soldiers. One of them came to me and said, “Why are you crying? Look around and see if anyone else who is as young as you is still alive.” Then, he brought me a glass of water and a couple of painkillers and said that he had a brother like me in [Punjab](#) †. I took the pills that he gave me. From him, I came to know that the Colonel had come.

After a while, the Colonel came and asked my name and talked with the Captain. Night set in again and it started to grow darker. Deep into the night, Abdul Haque Chowdhury and his son Mostafizur Rahman Chowdhury were taken out under the pretext of being sent to Saidpur. Within a few minutes, we heard their screams; that was the end of them. They took out a number of people and killed them like this all through that night. The number of prisoners started to dwindle. All they said was, “Come, you are going to Saidpur.” As I witnessed these horrors every night, all I could do was take a drink and pray that my name would not be called. My heart beat fast in dread of what might happen. Thus five days passed. I almost gave up any hope of staying alive. My voice had become weak, my mind could hardly register anything—strength, will, hope, despair—nothing. My eyes were swollen red too. Suddenly one day at 10 a.m., one of the guards opened the door to our room and ran straight up to me; he said that the Captain wanted to see me. This Punjabi soldier called Shahjee had always been kind to me. He was the one who would give me water and pills in secret because, as he said, he had a brother like me.

When I heard that I was being called, I felt certain that my time was up. But he comforted me that I might be released. He put a 10 taka note in my pocket and told me to eat something in the restaurant before I started off for my home in the village. I told him that we had a house in the city, I had relatives there. I said that I would not face any problem with food or shelter; I didn’t need the money. However, when I saw him get very upset, I took the money from him, and finally I left the camp, a free man.

The Saidpur Train Massacre

Dwarokaprasad Singhaniya

Businessman, Saidpur

It seems unbelievable how I and a few others survived the massacre that took place inside a train compartment near the end of the Saidpur-Golahat rail factory. I cannot fathom how brutal and inhumane one has to be to have indiscriminately killed men, women, and children like that. Within a few moments, 338 Marwaris* and Hindus lost their lives.

The dreadful day was June 13, 1971. At first, the Pakistani soldiers and their collaborators tortured us mercilessly that day. But the ordeal had started much earlier. On March 27, 1971, probably around 4 or 5 a.m. at dawn, Pak Army Captain Gul Hawladar, Major Fateh Khan, and numerous other soldiers, accompanied by [Bihari](#) † Rustom gunda (a thug), Secretary of the Relief Committee - Quayyum, Chairman Solim Khan, Amanul Haque, Municipality Vice-Chairman Jamiruddin, Izahar, Contractor Mayez, Babu [bhai](#) †, Chairman Ismail, Civil Administrator of Saidpur Municipality - Rafique Ahammad, Doctor G. M. Khan, Q.Q. Khan of Burma-Shell and many others, broke into our house and beat us mercilessly.

They demanded the key to the safe from me and my brother Satyanarayan while hitting us. Satyanarayan fetched the key from the cashier Bholanath Babu and handed it over to Captain Gul. They looted about sixty to seventy thousand taka in cash and jewelry. Before leaving, they took my father Hariyal Singhaniya. The Pak Army took many Bangalis as prisoners, especially Hindus and Marwaris. They were made to work on the Tantaon Bridge and the airport. These people were also often tortured brutally.

After two months of forced labor, on June 6, 1971, O.C. Jamal, [Subedar](#) † Aslam, non-Bengali soldiers and thugs seized me and three of my brothers along with many other Bangalis and took us to the [cantonment](#) † by bus. There, we were forced to work in inhumane conditions. During my stay at the cantonment, Major Javed Yunus, Captain Bakhtier Laal, Secretary Qayyum, and the Civil Administrator Rafique Ahammad used to beat me severely in order to forcefully convert me to Islam. They also tried to take my signature on a blank document.

At last the dreadful night arrived. At about 2 or 2:30 a.m., under strict guard, they hauled us on to a bus and took us to the Saidpur rail station. They said, "Let's take you to India." After a while, they brought my elder brother's wife Sita Devi and my daughter Kanchan Kumari there as well. Gradually they brought Bishnu Kumar and many other Marwaris and their children from Saidpur Marwari Lane. They were pushed into the train compartments and locked from the outside. Upon entering the compartments, we found armed non-Bengalis guarding each compartment. All the Hindus and Marwaris in the train had been brought in with the promise of a safe passage to India. Approximately at 5-5:30 a.m., the train started for Chilahati*. But all of a sudden, it stopped near the end of the Golahat Railway Factory. I could hear people crying and screaming. I looked outside in fright. In the light of the railway factory, I saw that non-Bengali police and many hoodlums - the Municipality peon Mohiuddin, betel leaf seller Mehedi, his brother Ismail, tailor Forhad, and many more were jumping onto the train with spears and machetes in their hands.

In front of my very eyes, Humki Chandawalla, Balichand Agarwala, Jugalkishor Agarwala, my sister-in-law Sita Devi, and some others were pulled out and killed. Realizing that death was certain for me too, I kicked a window open, jumped out, and fled for my life. A few more were able to escape like me. The police and military started shooting at us when they spotted us fleeing. Eventually some of us reached the house of Habibullah Master. It was morning by then and the time was approximately 6 a.m. Later on, some of us set out for India from there (Habibullah Master's house). It was beyond our imagination that so many people could be murdered in such a manner. Later we learnt 400 people were hauled onto that train. Among them 338 became Shaheeds (martyrs). May God rest their souls in peace.

□ *Chilahati* Chilahati is a border railway station in Bangladesh, situated in Nilphamari District, in Rangpur Division. At present it is a defunct railway transit point on the Bangladesh-India border.

□ *Marwari* The Marwari are an Indian ethnic group famous as traders. They originate from the Rajasthan region of India. The Marwari traders have historically been migratory in habit.

Six Times in the Tigers' Cage

Md. Shafiqul Alam Chowdhury

Businessman, Panchpir, Panchagarh

The [Razakar](#) † and [Peace Committee](#) † members had placed a bounty on my head. My offence was to have taken the lead and form the [\(Chhatra\) Sangram Parishad](#) † in Panchpir, Sakoa, and Mareya unions of Boda thana and in Shaldanga and Pamuli unions of Debiganj thana. Another charge against me was that I was involved in the training of local youths with the help of [Ansar](#) † members using rifles stolen from the Boda

Police Station.

Eventually I was captured. How that happened is a long story, and not a fascinating one at that. But what happened afterwards is not only unbelievable, but also unimaginable.

Upon capture, I was taken to the Nayadighi camp and was told that I was going to have some food over there. When we reached the camp, I saw the infamous [Al-Badr](#) † members Hobibor Commander, Syed Haji from Sakoa, Dr. Serajul, Hossain Dhakaiya, and Darajuddin. They asked me to join them for a meal. They put an empty glass and an empty plate in front of me but did not serve any food or water. They finished eating themselves but kept me tied up and made me starve the whole night. The next morning, September 4, two policemen arrived from the Boda Police Station and took me to the station. They put a blindfold over my eyes and tied my arms. I asked one of the policemen to remove the blindfold. I don't know why but he complied. As I opened my eyes, I saw people at the roadside staring at me with sympathetic, tearful eyes. At the police station, the station officer asked me to sit down. But the moment I sat down on a chair, a [Bihari](#) † policeman kicked me off the chair screaming, "Sala Madarchod, kyun kursi mein baitha ... Motherfucker! How dare you sit on the chair?" Utterly shocked, I said to the Bangali Inspector, "But I didn't even want to sit down!" The officer did not reply. He wrote down my name and address.

Then he ordered a policeman to blindfold and handcuff me and take me to the Boda High School field. When we reached the field, a military officer ordered to remove the blindfold. I saw Serajul Karim from Chandanbari sitting with a military officer and a few other military men. I said "Assalamu Alaikum" (May Allah bless you—salutation used by Muslims).

But the [Punjabi](#) † officer did not reply. Instead he asked, "Kya tum Hindu hai... Are you a Hindu?" I did not answer.

The next moment, two Punjabi soldiers put a blindfold on me again, held me by my arms, and dragged me to a Jeep. The Jeep started moving. I had no idea where they were taking me. The vehicle stopped after approximately half an hour. The soldiers pulled me out and kept me standing. They told me that we had reached the [cantonment](#) †. I presumed that we were at the Thakurgaon Cantonment. I heard a person passing us with chinaware in his hands. The man stopped and asked the soldiers, “*Ye kaun hai...* Who’s he?” The soldiers answered, “*Ye Mukti ka Colonel hai ... A Colonel of the Mukti Bahini* †.” Upon hearing this, the man kicked me in the gut with full force. Having been starved all day and all through the night, I passed out immediately.

When I woke up, I discovered myself among four live tigers! I could not muster the courage to open my eyes. As I lay immobilized, I thought that they wanted to feed me to the tigers. But a few moments later, the tigers walked away to the side of the cage and sat down. The R.P. (Regimental Police) came and closed a door that separated the tigers from me. I realized that the cage was specially made for the tigers and there was a partition in the middle, as well as a door. When I was kept inside, the tigers were in the same cage as me. But they did not harm me, and that surprised the Pakistanis. One Punjabi soldier came and threw a piece of burnt bread which landed on the tigers’ urine. I was too hungry to care and ate the bread. When I asked for water they mixed the water with tiger urine. But I was so thirsty that I drank that too. Evening fell, and they threw another burnt piece of bread at me—the same way they had served it during the day. I ate that again. At the end of the evening, I laid face down on the ground, when I saw the tiger cub coming towards me. It came close to me and laid down its head in between my legs. I was shuddering from fear. The thought that they would shoot me during the night kept me awake all through it. In the morning, I was again given a urine-soaked burnt piece of bread for breakfast. After I finished, a soldier tied my hands and took me to a Punjabi Major. He started interrogating me, “*Tum kaun party karta hai...* Which party do you work for?”

I answered, “I do Wali Khan’s [NAP](#) †.”

He swore at me and said, “*Behenchod, tum gaddar hai, Wali Khan bhi gaddar hai...* Sisterfucker! You are a traitor, just like Wali Khan!” He also asked me, “*Andar mein kitna Mukti hai. ... How many Mukti* † are inside the country?”

I answered that I did not know anything. The Major sprung out of his chair and started beating me on the head with a cane. I counted up to seven lashes before I passed out. When I regained consciousness, I found myself in the tiger-cage again, with the partition door open, and the tigers strolling around me. I shut my eyes in fear. But the tigers went back to their cage like the other day and the R.P. closed the partition door. I felt that my face was all wet, and it smelled like tiger feces. I realized that they had splashed water on me to wake me up, and for that they had used the container used for cleaning tiger feces. The next day, the Major summoned me again for interrogation. He asked me, “*Kitna gaddar admi hay idhar...* How many traitors are in this region?”

I said that I did not know.

He told me, “*Sala tumko golise marega ... I’ll shoot you, bastard!*”

I replied in Urdu, “*Aapko jo marzi aap kariye ... Do as you wish.*”

Then two soldiers took me out and made me sprawl on the ground. Then they called four more soldiers to hold me down by my limbs while two of them started stomping on my body with their boots. I started screaming and at one point lost consciousness. When I woke up, I found myself back among the tigers. They threw me a piece of bread like the other days. Around evening, they brought two men in. At 9 p.m., they were shot dead not much further away from me.

I could not sleep any of the nights. But the tiger cub did, with its head on my legs.

The next day, the Major called for me again and asked, “*Tum jo India se aaya, udhar kya kya dekha...* So you have come back from India; now tell me what did you see over there?”

I answered, “*Hum to India nahi gaya, aap ko k-ya batayega...* I did not go to India. what can I tell you?”

The Major sprung out of his chair, pulled on my hair, slapped me twice, and asked, “*Tumhare paas jo Sten gun aur rifle tha who kiske paas hai...* Whom did you pass on the Sten gun and the rifle that you had?”

I answered, “*Jaab EPR log India ja raha tha, hum un logo ko de diya...* When the [EPR](#) † members were going to India, I gave those to them.”

He said, “*Gaddar, suar ka baccha, abhi tak jhoot baat bolta hai...* You traitor, swine! Still lying?”

Then he ordered the Punjabi soldiers, “*Isko naak me kapra de kar pani daalo...* Put a piece of cloth on his nose and pour water on him.” They took me outside, put a piece of cloth on my nose, and started pouring water on me. I could not breathe and tried to kick free but failed. I thought I was going to die; so as a Muslim, I started reciting the Kalena (the primary Islamic verse). I don’t remember when I passed out. When I woke up, I was back in the tiger-cage. But the tigers again went back to their cage without harming me. I could not take it anymore. The torture was becoming unbearable. The diet of a single piece of bread was gradually making me weaker. So I decided that next time I would answer the Major’s questions, but I would lie.

The next day, the Major (his name was Rana) called me again. He started interrogating, “*Tum jab India se aa raha tha, tab tum kya dekha thiksey batao...* Tell me what did you see when you were coming back from India.”

Then I said, “*Jab hum India se aa raha tha kya bataye upko. Border ka us taraf kam se kam du mile tak hum tank aur bahut army dekha...* When I was coming back from India, I saw tanks and soldiers on the other side of the border lined up for two miles.”

Then he asked me, “*Mukti kidhar hai...* Where are the Mukti?”

I replied, “*Mukti border mein rehta hai ... The freedom fighters are around the borders.*”

Then he again asked me, “*East Pakistan ke andar Mukti rehta hai?... Are there any Mukti Bahini inside East Pakistan?*”

I answered, “*Ji nahi, un log border se idhar operation karta hai?* No sir, they operate from the other side of the border.” Listening to this the officer said, “*Ha ha thik baat kehta hay, jao isko le jao ... Yes, yes you are right. Take him away.*” They brought me back to the tigers’ cage. But this time, the partition door was not opened and the tigers not let in on my side.

Around afternoon, they brought about 15 people and threw them into the cage. As soon as they entered, the tigers attacked and slashed some flesh off the faces of ten to twelve of them. Those injured men were screaming terribly. In the evening the soldiers took all of them out and shot them dead.

The next day, they sent me to the Thakurgaon jail. Two days later they presented me to the S.D.O. (Sub Divisional Officer) court. The S.D.O. Mr. Taslimuddin was a Bangali. He asked me, “How many Biharis did you kill? And did you kidnap any soldier to hijack his weapon?”

I answered, “No sir, I did not kill any Biharis.”

The S.D.O. sent me back to the jail. The next day, I was taken to the court again. This time I was asked no question, and instead was

sentenced to two years in prison. As I was being taken out of the court, I told a friend present there to appeal to the district court judge against the verdict. As a result of the appeal, I was granted a bail and was released when the release order came to the jailer. But an army vehicle was waiting outside the jail and I was taken back to the cantonment as soon as I got out.

The Major said, “*Saala tum bhagne ka koshish karta hai... Scoundrel! You want to escape?*”

I told him, “*Ji nahi, judge sahab hum ko bail diya hai ... No sir, the judge granted me bail.*”

He didn't want to listen to anything I had to say and started beating me mercilessly with the cane. I passed out. When I woke up, I found myself back in the tiger-cage. The tigers were strolling around me. I was afraid that the tigers would not spare me this time, but they went back to their cage like before and the partition door was shut. I sat in the cage and got my daily bread. In the evening, the soldiers brought about ten people and shot them dead around 9 p.m.

The next day, another major came from Baliadangi. He asked, “*Tum kaun hai... Who are you?*”

I replied, “*Hum aadmi hai ... I am just a man.*”

He said, “*Sher ko nado... Touch the tiger.*”

I touched the tiger and it walked away. The major left.

Another day, a major came from Panchagarh. He told me to move my head close to the tiger's jaws. The door opened and I brought my head near the tiger's jaw but all four of them walked away to the other corner of the cage.

I could hear the soldiers talking among themselves, “*Ye bahut sharif ladka hai, sher is ko nahi khata hai! Kiun is ko chod nahi deta hai... This must be a very noble young man, the tigers don't eat him! Why don't they release him?*”

That afternoon, a colonel came to meet me and said, “*Tumhara koi taklif hai? Khana milta hai? Tumko hum musolman banaye ga. Tum ye rajniti chod do. Kitna padahlikkha kiya hai... Are you doing alright? Do you get food to eat? We will convert you to a Muslim. You have had a good education, you should leave this politics.*”

I said, “*Dekhiye Colonel sahib, hum to Musolman-hi hai. Aap musolman ho karke sher ka peshab aur paykhana se roti khawata hai, ye kya musolmani adat hai? Etna din humko aap rakha ektho ruti de kar, apka insaniyat nahi hay? Humko aap golise mar dijiye...* Look Colonel, I already am a Muslim. But you, a Muslim, are feeding me with bread soaked in urine and feces of tigers. What kind of a Muslim attitude is this? You have kept me on a diet of one bread for so long: where's your humanity? You better shoot me dead.”

Then he assured me, “*Thik hai, tum ko hum nahi marega, tum ko hum chhod denge, ajse tumko achche achche khana milega ... We will not shoot you and will make arrangements for your release, you will get good food from today.*”

Then he went away. There was a storm that evening. There was gusty wind and heavy rain. I was soaked in the rain through the whole night and was left standing till the next afternoon.

Throughout my captivity, the soldiers used to bring in people almost every day into the cantonment and shoot them. They killed about 150 people in this way. A few days later, when the Mukti Bahini and the [Allied Forces](#) † attacked Omarkhana of Panchagarh, the Colonel sent me to the Thakurgaon Police Station's jail. I reminded him, “*Colonel saab aap musolman ho kar hamara saath wada kiya hum ko chhod denge ... Colonel Sir, as a Muslim you had promised that you would release me,*” but he did not reply.

Two days after I went to the Thakurgaon Police Station's jail, the Allied Forces approached Bhulli of Thakurgaon. The Punjabi inspector released all the detainees except me and fled to Saidpur. The next Chief Inspector of Thakurgaon Police Station, Md. Sattar, was a relative of mine. I managed to have a little chat with him. He assured me that if he survived, so would I. At 6 a.m., he left the key to my lock-up with me before he fled. I opened the cell and escaped too. At that time, the Punjabi soldiers were busy digging trenches around Thakurgaon. I changed my clothes and disguised myself and was able to escape to my home .

The Prison-camp Days

Muhammad Abu Noor

Teacher, Siddheswari Boys' High School, Dhaka

In 1971, I used to live in Khilgaon with my father and my younger brother. Sometimes I would spend the night at one of my friend's place in Eskaton. On July 13, I came to my workplace, Siddheswari Boys' High School from that friend's house. Back then, the school would start at 9:00 a.m. and end at 2:00 p.m. Very few students were attending school at the time. But it was payday, and most of the teachers were present. At around noon, I was having a chat with one of my colleagues in an empty room. Suddenly, we all heard the sound of heavy footsteps. Alarmed, we looked outside through the windows and saw some [Punjabi](#) † policemen standing on the road in front of the school. They had rifles on their shoulders. Later, we came to know that they had surrounded the whole school. It should be mentioned that the Bangali policemen did not have any jurisdiction in this country at that time. The infamous Punjabi police held absolute power.

Three or four Punjabi policemen came in with revolvers drawn and stopped in front of the room I was in. Pointing at a small piece of paper one of them asked in Urdu, “*Abu Noor kaun hai ... Who is Abu Noor?*” They had already been informed that I was in that room, so I stood up. They ordered me to get out of the room. As soon as I walked out the door, one of them grabbed me by the collar while another did a quick ‘body search’. Holding the revolver against my back, they walked me to the police Jeep parked in front of the gate. As I approached the Jeep, I saw that they had also brought my colleague Mr. Nazmul Hossain. They put me and Nazmul on the Jeep. Under strict guard, they drove us around a roundabout route, but eventually took us to the [Rajarbagh Police Lines](#) †. On the way, they forced us to keep our heads low all the time.

It was about 1 p.m. They kept us standing in a Punjabi police officer's room. Here they searched my pockets again. I had a small amount of money, a cigarette-lighter, and a bankcheckbook in my pocket. They seized all these items as well as my watch. At one point, I asked why they had brought us there. This vexed the Punjabi officer. He started cursing in Urdu and English. After keeping us standing there for a while, they took us to Ramna Police Station. There they kept us locked up for some time and then took us to the veranda at the back, where they made us sit on the floor and started interrogating us. When we were unable to answer some of the questions, they slapped and smacked us. One of the Punjabi policemen made me and my colleague lie on the floor and tortured us inhumanely.

At first, one of the policemen grabbed me by the hair and laid me face-down on the ground. Then another started hitting me all over indiscriminately with a heavy cane; while a third grabbed my feet and twisted them. My whole body was writhing from pain. I was soaked in sweat. After carrying on this torture for about 15 to 20 minutes, they started the interrogation again. It started with a few simple questions: what my name was, what do my family members do, etc. Then they asked me about the [Mukti Bahini](#) †. I told them I could not answer any of those questions, so they started hitting me again.

Around evening they put handcuffs on our wrists and took us back to the Rajarbagh Police Lines. At about 9 p.m., they brought in an elderly father along with his son. The old gentleman was most probably a supervisor at the Attorney General's office. The son was one of our former students; he was an engineer at that time. His nickname was Kamru. After torturing them for a while, they were made to spend the whole night standing side by side, stark naked! In the civilized 20th century, a father and a son had to pass the night standing naked in front of everybody! On that night, they gave us a couple of rotis and a very minimal amount of curry to eat. During the one month I was held captive, sometimes they would throw their leftover breads at us. There was no other meal arrangement for the prisoners.

The next day at dawn, they took us to a room. Eight or ten others were there, imprisoned like us. None of them were in a good condition. Signs of physical assault were visible on everyone's body.

A Punjabi Police [Subedar](#) † named Bajwah led the torture with his sidekicks.

At 9 a.m., they took off my shirt and pants. I only had my underwear on. Three or four of them threw me face down on the floor and started hitting and torturing me. They kept hitting me with a thick cane. They twisted my feet around and hit the undersides of the feet with the cane. As they hit me, my head started to feel dizzy. I started sweating in intense pain. My throat was dry. When I asked for some water, I was not given any. After torturing me like that for a long time, when I had almost lost consciousness, one of them stood upon my body and stomped all over me. Then they pulled me up and made me sit up. One Punjabi sub-inspector of police started interrogating me holding a thick cane in his hand. He hit me hard on the palms of my hands if I answered 'no' to any of the questions to which they expected to hear a 'yes'. Since I always gave them the same answers, they would get more furious at me and torture me harder. They tortured others in the same way. That was how the morning session went.

Then they put handcuffs on my hands and tied me to the leg of an iron-framed bed. Leaving me with some guards, Bajwah left with his sidekicks. At noon, they brought in a few more captives. When the police had finished their lunch and had taken some rest, they resumed their torture again. They also started to take our statements. I was lying on the floor. One of the policemen asked me to sit up. This time he had a pen and a piece of paper as he interrogated me. Most of their questions were about the Mukti Bahini. I told them that I knew nothing about the Mukti Bahini. After interrogating and beating me up for some time, they gave up. And thus ended the afternoon session.

At about 8 or 9 p.m., they resumed their brutalities. The extreme torture had made me sort of disoriented, and that was when they began their interrogation again. Whenever I would say that I did not know the answer to any question, they would slap me around and hit me with the butt of a rifle. That was how I spent the first 24 hours of my imprisoned life. They used to torture everyone else in almost the same manner. They tortured me three times a day, for seven consecutive days. Sometimes the Pakistan military and [EPR](#) † officers would come as well. One day, an EPR officer asked me whether I had completed my Master's degree. As soon as I answered 'Yes', he and his friends started slapping and hitting me. Almost everyone who visited used to smack us or kick us.

There was a thick wire strung across the room for hanging wet clothes to dry. They stretched my hands on both sides of the wire and then handcuffed me. They made me stand like that for 48 hours. Both of my legs got swollen from standing for so long. Even in this condition, they would kick and smack me whenever they felt like it.

After two days, as soon as they uncuffed me, I lost consciousness. I could not move normally for several days after that.

In an attempt to get information out of the prisoners, they would try to get them drunk. A non-Bengali businessman, from Khatunganj in Chittagong, used to stay there. He was fluent in speaking Bangla. He was the one who tried to get the prisoners drunk to get statements out of them. But none of the prisoners drank. I never heard or saw any prisoner spill out any secrets. Once they brought in a young man and tortured him so much that he died eventually. The police made the other prisoners put the corpse inside a sack. Then the police took the sack away. They tied up the hands of another teenaged prisoner extremely hard, and then left him like that for two days. As the blood circulation was cut off, his hands were infected and started to rot. Then, without any treatment, they let him go one day.

Another day, they tied me up again on that wire for clothes, and kept me standing on my feet. At around 9 a.m., an army officer, a Punjabi police officer, and several Punjabi policemen surrounded me. Each of them smacked and punched me. One of them held his revolver against my chest and said "*Sach batao, nahi to tumko goli marega...* Tell me the truth, otherwise I will shoot you."

I replied in English and broken Urdu that I had already told them whatever I had to say, and I did not have anything new to inform them.

The person holding the revolver yelled, "I will shoot you!" It felt as if they would not spare me. However, after a couple of more slaps, they left.

Another day, a young P.A.P. officer of Punjab police came to see me. He asked me a couple of questions. I wanted to talk to him for a couple of minutes. He agreed to listen. I told him, "Look, you surely do not have more educational qualification than me. Just look at the way you have me and the rest of the prisoners. If you have any complaints against us then send us to the court. But you do not have the right to keep us imprisoned like this." I spoke to him in English.

After listening to me, he got very angry and started yelling. He asked about a young boy who had escaped from them. I told him that I heard his name after my arrival there, but I did not know him.

They used to strip most of the prisoners naked and stare at them. One day they stripped one of the captives, and ordered the other captives to pluck out his pubic hair. Being forced, the other captives did what they were told.

A lot of times they would wake us up in the middle of the night, beat us, and then interrogate us. At night, we used to sleep on the floor using our hands as pillows. One night at around 2 a.m., they woke me up. Someone asked me if there was anyone I wanted to see, if I wanted to eat sweets, etc. I feared that they were about to kill me or maybe they wanted to create more mental pressure on me so that I would tell them something voluntarily. I answered, "I do not want to meet anyone, nor do I want anything particular to eat."

One night, they kept me awake all night under the guard of a [Bihari](#) † [Razakar](#) † in a dark and empty room. The next day, I was taken to another room. As I went there, I saw a lot of other captives. I knew a few of them. The famous musician Dhir Ali Miah, who is not alive today, was one of the captives there. I had to write a statement there by my own hand. We used to live in that room guarded by two Punjabi policemen. Sometimes those two policemen would sneak in a slice of bread or maybe a couple of cigarettes to us. During that time, some street urchins, who

lived by the streets, used to collect leftovers from the Rajarbagh Police Lines. They would bring us some of their collected leftovers at times. Those two policemen on guard did not assault us as much.

One day, a janitor came to sweep the room. During our conversation, I came to know that he was also the janitor of the Shantinagar branch of Habib Bank (now Agrani Bank). At that time, one of my friends used to work in that branch. I asked the janitor whether he knows him or not. He recognized my friend. Getting a piece of paper and a pen from a policeman, I was able to send a letter through the janitor. In the letter, I asked my friend to pay the man ten taka for his favor. The janitor took the money from him, but he brought it back to me instead of keeping it. I had written two applications for leave on behalf of those two policemen as well. That is why I had the courage to ask them for a piece of paper and a pen. After receiving that letter, my friends and relatives finally came to know where I had been for all the time that I had been missing.

About a week before my release, I was told that I would be set free if I gave them some money. Bajwah demanded two thousand taka from me. In the end he settled for fourteen hundred. They brought me the check-book that they had seized from me. I signed a check of six hundred Taka and promised to pay the rest of the money the day after they set me free, as I did not have that much in my bank account then. They took a captive with them and cashed the check. They set me free that very evening. That was August 7, 1971.

Massacred for a Funeral

Abdul Hannan Thakur

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The village of Noapara is located close to the mountain river Someshwari. Situated about three miles south from Durgapur, it is a very remote village. My friend Araj was from this village. The late Nabi Hossain was his father. With a tanned complexion and a toned body, his features had an ethnic look. He had somewhat of a flat nose, a round face, and a broad forehead. I met him first in August 1968 at Ishwarganj College in Mymensingh. He had just graduated from the [University of Dhaka](#) †, majoring in Philosophy. My friend Araj was in love with Farida from the village of Kakanhati. He often told me that he would leave his college job if he could not marry Farida. And so he did. One day in January 1970, he transferred as a lecturer to Netrokona College. Farida cried a lot that day.

And then came the horrific 1971. All around us, there was the brutality of the Pak hyenas. It was August 1971. A student named Ruhul had just returned from a reconnaissance mission and was exhausted. A freedom fighter, Ruhul was from a village next to Araj's. He said, "Last evening the Pak Army took Araj Ali sir to their camp. I do not know the whole incident. Sir, could you please check on that?"

Stunned by the news, I stared at him blankly for a few moments. I went out to look for Araj.

The following day, around two in the afternoon, the sun was scorching overhead. I sat down to rest under the shade of the large albizia tree near the Netrokona railway station. The thatched huts in front of the station were all gone. The Pakistani invaders had burnt those down because they were supposedly occupied by the 'Muktis' †.

The station was deserted. Only the station master was there in one room going over the books. He used to get tense every time he saw a human being, thinking that the Pakistan Army had arrived. Behind the station, there was a tin-shed dormitory for the Netrokona College students. The professors' dormitory, an L-shaped building, was adjacent to it. There was a small tea-stall in one corner of the station. It was very old. I knew the twelve year old boy who ran the stall; his name was Nimai. He beckoned me for a chat, "Sir, come here, we need to talk. Do not stay here in the station. The army has been regularly patrolling here." I asked Nimai, "Do you know anything about Araj?"

He replied, "The enemy captured Araj sir and took him to the camp. They let him go before sun set."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"I take bananas, eggs, and bread inside the camp every now and then," he replied.

"Where is Araj?"

Through the window of the tea-stall, Nimai pointed his finger at Araj Ali's room. There was not a single soul at the station compound. I headed for the professors' dormitory. The main street of the town runs in front of Netrokona College. On that street, I saw two trucks full of army militia. The trucks were loaded with arms and ammunition. I walked by the trucks and went straight to Araj's room.

Seeing me, Araj jumped up with excitement. We were seeing each other after almost a year. We had a lot to catch up on. Hence we were really engrossed in our conversation. Araj did not look too worried. He was still joyful and energetic and his heart was still full of the youthful love for Farida.

At night, I asked Araj what was really going on with him. He said, "Yesterday the Principal (Tasaddak Ahmad) called me into the college and said 'The Colonel from the military camp wants to see you. He did not give any reason why.' But the Principal assured me that there was nothing to be worried about. Trusting his words, I went to the camp to see the Colonel." "I had seen him before. But this time I was a bit scared to see him. Just as I had stepped in his room, the Colonel asked in English, 'Are you Araj Ali, Professor of Philosophy? Are you from Noapara?'"

I replied, "Yes."

The Colonel sounded angry this time, "Are you aware that the freedom fighters have set up a camp in your house?" I said, "No."

To this he growled like a wolf, "We have reports that freedom fighters have set up a camp with arms and ammunition in your Noapara residence. You have given them your permission to do so and also made arrangements for their food and lodging." I replied, "I do not know anything about this."

The Colonel jumped up in fury. A few moments later, he calmed down a bit and said in an icy voice, "Think again Professor, you still have time. Admit the truth and we will let you go."

I repeated that I had no clue what he was talking about. The Colonel told me, "Alright then. I will give you seven more days. If you confess to the truth, we will let you go. But during these seven days, you are not to leave the college for any reason. I have discussed it with Principal Tasaddak already; he will explain the rest to you."

After I left the army camp, I went straight to the Principal's room and narrated everything to him in detail. He told me, "Stay in the

dormitory. I will contact you if I hear anything.”

He finished his story, and seemed indifferent. I felt a little uncomfortable. I asked Araj what he thought of the whole incident. He was silent and thought for a while. Then he continued, “I told you earlier about the misdeeds of Kitab Ali Talukdar from Durgapur. It can be a plot of his and the notorious scoundrel Hamid Member of the [Peace Committee](#) † could be aiding him.”

Kitab Ali Talukdar was the Chairman of the local Peace Committee. He was on very good terms with the then Governor [Monem Khan](#) †. His friend Hamid Member was a member of the committee.

Araj said again, “I don’t know if the [Mukti Bahini](#) † has set up a camp at my place. Even if they have without my knowledge, what is the big deal? As a Bangali I support that. Today or tomorrow, this country will be independent.” There was a steely determination in his eyes as he spoke.

I said, “Araj, come with me. Let’s go to Meghalaya (India). They won’t be able to find you there.” He answered, “Then those army beasts will capture our Principal. They will torture him, burn my house down. My elder brother lives there. They will kill him.” After my repeated insistence, he promised to join me after a week. Next morning, as I left, he looked very sad.

I went to Nimai’s tea-stall after I left the dorm. I decided to take shelter at Nimai’s house. It was only five hundred yards away from the station. Nimai used to keep me updated about the Pakistan Army’s whereabouts. He would collect information throughout the day and share them with me at night. On August 13, he came with the shocking news: the Pak Army had captured Araj that evening and taken him to the military camp.

It was a dark and silent night. The sky was cloudy. I came out of the house, alone, stumbling as I moved along. Adjacent to the military camp was the dormitory of the Primary Teachers’ Training Institute. My uncle Moyna lived there. I went directly to his room. I asked if it was true that Pak Army had brought Araj there. He pointed towards the front of the building. As I followed his direction, I froze in terror. It was a horrifying sight. They had hung Araj upside down from a ring on the ceiling; his legs were tied together. He had nothing but an underwear on his body. The Pakistani thugs were whipping him, cutting deep with every strike. As blood gushed from his body, the beasts roared out in laughter. They were torturing him inhumanely. His cries of pain echoed through the air.

At one point, he stopped screaming. His body was just hanging there, motionless. The executioner brought him down to the floor and sprinkled water all over his body. After some time, he regained consciousness. A demonic pleasure again arose among the murderous lot. They rushed on Araj, kicking him with their boots. I could see the wounds all over his body. He was moaning in unbearable pain. The Colonel came and said, “Speak the truth while there’s still time, and we will let you go.” All of a sudden Araj shouted, “I don’t know anything. That’s the truth.” The Colonel left without saying a word. It was hard to recognize Araj anymore. He just lay there face down on the ground—his body wounded and covered in blood. About half an hour after the Colonel left, someone from the gang brought some food. Araj did not even look at it.

It was August 15. The whole city was quiet. At noon, they blindfolded Araj with a black cloth. He was still only wearing that underwear. Araj was sitting on the floor. An army Jeep was parked under the albizia tree at the station. There were only a few rail cars, each of them occupied by fully-armed Pakistani soldiers, looking for their next prey.

An army Jeep took blindfolded Araj to the station. They put him on the train. The news of the Pak Army taking Araj to the Durgapur military camp spread around with lightning speed. Another military Jeep picked up Araj from Purbadhala station. The Jeep drove through the hilly roads. It passed by Araj’s home but he could not see it. I took another route and went to his house. I saw his elder brother, sitting in a corner of the balcony, speechless. His grieving mother kept fainting.

I told Araj’s brother, “Get away from this house as soon as you can. The Pak Army may come and burn down this house any moment now.” He looked at me, baffled. I said, “Whatever important you have within close reach, just grab those and run away. The monsters of the Pak Army have taken Araj to the Durgapur military camp. Leave this house quickly.” Within a few minutes, three military Jeeps stopped in the backyard of their house. Kitab Ali Talukdar, the Chairman of the Peace Committee, was sitting in one of them with his accomplice Hamid Member. I left Araj’s unconscious brother in the house of a neighbor and headed for Durgapur. As I left, I saw that the Pakistani soldiers outside were rejoicing while Chairman Kitab Ali Talukdar puffed a cigarette sitting on the Jeep.

The military camp at Durgapur was at the side of Durgapur bazaar, on the bank of the river Someshwari. I took shelter at Bipin’s house near the camp. After going there, I was informed that a colonel had arrived from Netrokona and they would probably kill Araj that night. My friend Joynul Abedin’s house was nearby. I spent the night there, terrified and unsettled. 10 a.m., August 16, 1971. A few soldiers of the Pak Army brought Araj from the military camp. He was still blindfolded and was looking gruesome. They were dragging his nearly lifeless body. People gathered around. I also blended into the crowd. The Pak Army’s main target was to demonstrate the unspeakable horror of their execution. They were not saying anything to anyone. A colonel came out with a cane in his hand. His eyes reflected atrociousness.

Araj was made to stand by the river bank. The water of Someshwari was touching his feet. The Colonel came and asked, “Tell me now! Did the Mukti camp at your house?”

He answered “No. I don’t know.”

The colonel barked, “Shut up! Tell me the truth.”

Araj replied for the last time, “Listen Colonel, I am a student and fan of [G.C. Dev](#) †. I can never tell a lie.” The Colonel’s face tightened. The machine guns roared. Araj’s chest was crisscrossed with bullets. His body turned red with blood and he fell into the river. Two Pakistani soldiers threw his lifeless body into the strong current of Someshwari.

Next day, August 17. Durgapur was mourning. People gathered after the noon prayer by the Someshwari to pay their last respects to their beloved child. They joined in a ‘gayebana janazah’ (a funeral service without the dead body) wishing eternal peace on Araj’s soul.

The Pak hyenas were furious at the news of the funeral. They announced that anyone who took part in the funeral was to be brought to the camp. Twenty innocent villagers, most of them poor starved farmers, were taken to the camp immediately. Their only crime was that they had taken part in Araj’s funeral. From my friend’s house, I looked on the acts of these horrifying animals. They were mad with fury. Those twenty unfortunate villagers were brought to that cursed river bank. Each one of them was blindfolded with a black cloth and had his hands tied in the back. All of the twenty innocent men from Durgapur were tied together with a single rope and forced to get into the river and stand in a single line in the water. They (Pakistanis) yelled, “Stand in line!”

Within seconds, the machine guns of the hyenas roared together. None of the poor unfortunate souls was spared from that continuous gunfire. All of them collapsed into the cold Someshwari within moments. The water turned red from their blood. And once again, the hyenas of the Pak Army celebrated their barbaric victory.

I Cannot Remember Anything

Humayun Ahmed*

Author, Screenwriter, Playwright and Filmmaker, Educator,
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On May 4, 1971, the Pakistani military led by Colonel Atiq entered Pirojpur town. They had entered a deserted town. We were expecting that the army would face a stiff resistance from the large group of freedom fighters positioned inside the town. This group had been trained by Major Jalil, Captain Zia, and a Bangali officer of the Pakistan Navy whose name I cannot recall at the moment. Surprisingly, when the Pakistani military anchored their gunboats at Hularhat and attacked the town from three sides, not a single bullet was fired at them by the freedom fighters. Probably they felt too intimidated. Neither were they prepared to face such a strong military force in ground combat. The military entered the town with zero resistance. Some of our own people welcomed the military! They chanted “*Pakistan Zindabaad ... Long live Pakistan*,” and “*Yahya Khan Zindabad... Long live [Yahya Khan](#)*.” Perhaps they had no idea just whom they were welcoming.

At that time, I was hiding along with my siblings in a village seven or eight miles away from town. Of all the strange news that reached us from the town, we did not know what to believe or what not to believe. For example, there was news of a wretched prisoner whose legs were held spread eagle by two Pakistani soldiers while another hacked him into two pieces with an axe! Another story of killing was that the prisoners were asked to climb date trees, and they were shot as they climbed. When the wounded prisoners fell from the tree, the soldiers would rejoice shouting “We are plucking dates.” We also heard that someone named ‘Bhagirath’ or ‘Bhagirathee’ had been tied to a military Jeep and dragged through the streets of the town. He was eventually killed this way. It was like a game of death. But these were all news that I heard from others and I took them with a pinch of salt. Later, I read the description of these kinds of killings actually happening in the “History of Bangladesh War of Independence Documents Vol.-8.”

The military were able to establish a reign of terror within seven days after they entered Pirojpur town. On the bank of the river Baleshwar, the steamer jetty was transformed into a [Boddho-bhumi](#) †. The leader of these mass killings was Captain Ejaj, whose favorite line was, “*Jetty me bhej do ... Send them to the jetty.*” So those ill-fated people were sent to the jetty. What happened afterwards needs no description. Within a few days, the military lost interest in killing people by shooting them. They tried to make the manslaughters amusing. They came up with several new ways of killing, like tying up their hands and legs and throwing them into the water or by hanging them from trees. Then there were even incidents of people being skinned alive.

Terror seized us. We had nowhere to go. Villages were being burnt down one after another. The Hindu population had taken refuge in the deep forests. Words fail to express their distress. The skies were pouring overhead. Snakes and animals in the forests made it very dangerous to hide there, while outside awaited the Pakistani forces and their collaborator [Razakars](#) †. Countless corpses floated downstream on the river Baleshwar. In a situation like this, I was tipped off that the Pakistani forces were looking for me and my younger brother. We were both university students at that time and according to the Pakistani forces our father was an ‘enemy of the country’. They had already killed him and now they were looking for us*.

The person who had given us shelter in his home came up with an idea to save the two of us. He suggested that we get admitted at the madrasah run by the Peer* of Sharshina. The plan was that we will stay in the dormitory of the madrasah and study there.

Hence wearing pajama- [panjabi](#) † and caps, we started for Swarupkathi with the gentleman who had provided refuge for us. We reached the courtyard of the Peer. Upon arriving, we learned that the military had come to exchange greetings with the Peer on May 6 and returned after taking blessings from the Peer. And on their way back, they destroyed everything that had come across their path.

It came to my knowledge that the Peer of Sharshina had very good contacts with the military. They accepted the hospitality of the Peer whenever they visited Swarupkathi. The Peer did not agree to keep us in the madrasah. We did not want to stay either. We were thinking of escaping from the place as soon as possible. I felt that the farther we were from the place, the safer it would be for us. (I’ve heard that the Peer of Sharshina was later awarded the ‘Shadhinota Padak’*, a special recognition for the contribution to our war of independence! I still cannot believe this is true. Newspapers, radio, television, the media are known to publish fake and untruthful scoops, I think this must be something of that sort. *The full name of the Peer is Abu Zafar Mohammad Saleh - Editor*)

I will bring an end to this article describing a scene that I saw while we were coming back from Sharshina by boat. We were sitting on an open boat under a cloudy sky. There was high tide in the river and it was drizzling. Suddenly the boatman cried for our attention, “Look, look at that!”

We saw two dead bodies floating downstream. It was not a scene to observe with wonder. It was a pretty common sight by that time. Everyday, numerous dead bodies would float downstream in the river. Vultures rested on the bodies in groups and drowsed, perhaps overabundance had made them lose their appetite for human flesh. But that day, there were no vultures sitting on those two bodies. I kept gazing at the sight! I could not take my eyes off. It was the body of a young male about thirty years old, wearing a green shirt. A young girl, maybe seven or eight years old was clinging onto him by his neck. The girl was wearing red bangles on her wrist. The girl had been embracing her father till the moment of her death. I cannot even imagine how scared this little girl was at that moment. I do not even want to know.

I want to forget everything.

Later (probably around the month of August), I was captured by the military. I was kept in their prison. I tried to write about that experience several times, but in vain. Everything becomes a blur whenever I try to put it in words. I cannot piece the images together. Whatever incident I decide to write down, I suddenly find myself at a loss. It seems like I have lost only that part of my memory. I don’t understand why it happens, probably a psychologist could explain.

I can only remember one thing very clearly—I was sprawled out on a cold floor screaming for water. The screaming had stopped the punishment for the moment. Water was brought in a watering pot used in the toilets. I gulped it all down from the big pot of water, but my thirst was not satisfied. Rather it multiplied by a thousand times. My memory of imprisonment is a memory of extreme thirst. I don’t know the

explanation behind this thirst. I cannot remember anything.

- *Peer* A term used to indicate a religious leader in the Indian sub-continental region. Usually an Islamic spiritual leader, with many followers over a wider geographical area.
- *Shadhinota Padak* Independence Day Award or Independence Award is the highest state award given by the government of Bangladesh.
- Humayun Ahmed is a prolific writer, one of the most popular writers of contemporary Bangla literature. His first novel was published in 1972. He wrote over 200 books till his death in 2012. His father Faizur Rahman Ahmed, a police officer and writer, was killed by Pakistani military during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971. His younger brother is the famous writer and scientist Muhammed Zafar Iqbal, a Professor of Computer Science and Engineering in the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, Sylhet .

I Was Forced To Change My Religion

Kanon Sarker

Teacher, Mymensingh

There were several near death experiences during the nine long months of the Liberation War. It was an unsettling, suffocating feeling : as if we were all waiting to die. After the heinous genocide of [March 25](#) †, everyone started to flee the cities in fear. I also left for my aunt's house in Palashihata, a village about 20 miles away from Mymensingh town, with my parents and my two and a half year old son. Professor Jatin Sarker (my husband) stayed back in town with his parents and siblings. So as I was leaving town, I was worried about what will happen to the rest of my family. For nine months, I did not know their whereabouts. Later, I came to know that they had gone to their village home in Netrokona just a couple of days before the Pakistani military came to Mymensingh.

We were staying at my aunt's house. First came the bandits and then the military. Haunted by them, we fled to our own house in the village of Shibrampur, three miles south of Palashihata. We passed our days there in dreadful suspense as well. The military nabbed my cousin Ramendra Narayan Dey from his house. He had gone back there in secret to check on the condition of the house. He told us that he would be back soon. He never did return. They burnt down the house as well. I was at home with my parents, two brothers, and one sister-in-law. Fear and uncertainty was everywhere. There was an army post set up just one and a half miles from our house. We could have been attacked at any moment. Besides, the [Razakars](#) † had already organized in the village. Every now and then they would carry out an 'operation'. We were reeling like pawns in a labyrinth inside the village. The District Board Highway (main road to the district headquarters) passed right by our home. It was the only entry point of the village. The military could come from either direction using that road. We were stuck in the village with no way out. So, in order to survive, we stuck to the ditches and roads inside the village, always trying to keep out of sight from the Pakistan Army.

And so it went on - on one hand there was the brutality of the Pak Army and the Razakars and on the other hand there was this craze for forced religious conversions to Islam. We would continuously hear about atrocities going on in the neighboring villages. People were now hiding in the nearby hills for safety. Emotionally I was a wreck, almost on the verge of breaking down. In this condition, on August 12, volunteers from the [Mukti Bahini](#) † instructed us to leave the village before dawn as the military was coming the next day. But we had nowhere to go! We were exhausted, both physically and emotionally, from the incessant struggle to stay alive. But I guess that survival is truly a basic human instinct.

And so we were on the road, again. It was late at night and it was quiet and dark. We had been walking for miles for a safe shelter. Suddenly, from far beyond, someone shouted for us to stop. They threatened to shoot us if we moved an inch further. I saw a powerful light moving quickly towards us. I suspected the worst and thought that these were Razakars. Probably four or five persons blocked our path and had their rifles aimed at us. They introduced themselves as Mukti Bahini. They had thought that we were Razakars and were about to shoot us. Then they saw the end of my saree in the glow of the lantern and stopped. Taking their advice, we put out the lantern and walked about a mile to take shelter in a house in the village Kakonerpur. The owner of the house was named 'Bharatbasi' (*literal meaning in Bangla is 'Citizen of India' - Editor*) . Even under that situation, I could not but laugh. I told him that his name was enough to get everybody killed. We took shelter in an almost deserted house. A couple of goats and dogs were in the same room as us. The room had firewood stacked high up to the ceiling; it was full of rodents. Who knew if there were snakes or not? We spent the whole night awake in fear of the venomous creatures. We stayed there for four days and returned home on August 16. As soon as we came back, we heard that the military were about to come; people who had returned home were fleeing once again. We were so tired that it was not possible for us to move out this time. We stayed back and spent the night at one of our Muslim neighbors'. Wherever we went, we heard that the only way to survive was to convert and become a Muslim. There were rumors of forced conversions in the neighboring villages. We did not have any means to verify the truth behind those rumors. One of our relatives, Dr. Anil Das, told us, "There is a heavy push to become Muslims; there seems to be no other way to survive. I have decided that I will convert and become a Muslim. You should do the same. Staying alive is more important than religion."

When it became absolutely impossible to live in the village like this, we tried to come back to the city upon hearing that life there was coming back to normal. Through a boy in our village, I contacted the Principal of my school (I was a teacher in an English medium school), Sister Helen. My brother also wrote a letter to his student Helal. The boy returned with replies from Sister Helen and Helal the very next day. Sister Helen even sent some money for me as transportation cost. With his reply, Helal sent an attached letter in Urdu advising that if anything happened on the way we should show this letter to the concerned people. He wrote, "Don't worry, just come."

On August 27, we left for the city at the crack of dawn along with two Muslim young men from our village. Around 7 a.m., we reached the

home of a Razakar Commander in Bakta village. He was the in-law of one of our companions. Besides, the Razakar Commander's father and uncle were students of my grandfather and were very fond of him. He was in fact quite embarrassed when he received us. Everyone in that house was scared to think about our fate. One college student warned us about all the dangers on the road. Not only that, he even threatened the father of the Razakar Commander that the military would burn down his house if he gave shelter to Hindus. The gentleman replied, "I don't care if they are Hindu or not. If they want to set fire to my house for providing shelter to some people, so be it. That is none of your business." His words reassured us.

Covering ourselves in [burqa](#) †, we took a baby-taxi (a motorized three wheeler taxi) and reached Helal's home in the city at around 4 p.m. They received us cordially and we stayed there for a couple of days. But we dared not step outside the house during our stay. Helal's mother became paranoid that their house might be set on fire because they had sheltered some Hindus. Helal and his brothers were really embarrassed at their mother's paranoia, but we thought it was only appropriate that we left their house. We took shelter in Ali Asgar's house; another of my brother's students. But how long could this continue? Who would give us shelter day after day?

Everybody was saying that it was not safe to stay like this. We needed identity cards to go out and move about. No one would rent us their house as we were Hindus. It was the same story as in the village - we had to convert to Islam to survive. Many people had already converted and others were also in the process. We were not sure what to do. Should we convert and become Muslims? Was there any other way? We could not even get out of the house let alone return to our jobs. Seeing no other alternative, I forced myself to be strong. We had a discussion with our parents; we had to convince them that survival should be our first priority.

We needed to live before upholding our religious identity. So we all converted. After convincing my parents, we accepted Islam as our faith at the big mosque with the help of Ali Asgar and his father Mr. Abul Ali. With the help from the daughter of the Imam (cleric of mosque), we were taught to perform *wudu* (ablution). Then the Imam told us to hold on to the four corners of a white linen. He started reciting a surah (verses from the Quran) urging us to repeat after him loudly. In the middle of the recitation, he would sharply admonish us, "Recite louder, this is not your Hindu Mantra (scripture)." I wished the earth beneath my feet would split so I could slip underneath. But there was no other way - we were like sacrificial animals. I had already stopped using religious emblems like conch bangles and sindoor* in the village and now I was forsaking my religion as well. In lieu of the religion, we got Identity Cards for our security. It allowed us to rent a house. Mr. Abul Ali arranged the rental for us. Both my brother and I went back to our respective jobs. We came to know that Mr. Dwijen Chowdhury who was the Additional District Judge of Mymensingh at the time, artist Sunil Dhar, Headmaster of Begunbari School Mr. Shashank Mohan Dey, Mr. Nripendra Sarker, Mr. Manoranjan Sen, Mr. Bishnu Pod Bhattacharya, and many others had converted to Islam. The worst part was that the news of our conversion was announced all over the city almost as soon as we converted, "Professor Jatin Sarker's entire family along with his in-laws have converted to Islam." They had not done the same in the case of the others. We were shocked and realized that all this was done on purpose - they had kept us under extreme mental pressure by design.

It became even more evident when I met with Sister Helen in the school. She told me that if we had met her earlier, she would have never let this happen. She was deeply sorry to hear about it all. There I met my colleague Jyotsna Mitra. She did not have to convert to Islam. I came to know from her that Sister Helen provided all of them with a cross on a chain and an "ID Card" bearing a Christian name. They did not have to change their faith. They were not the only ones; Sister Helen had provided many people seeking shelter with the same. Even to our Hindu cleric Shibu Thakur. As with many others, she had also made arrangements for two rooms in the school for my colleague Jyotsna Mitra and her family. She could not take me in as there was no more space available but she gave me her phone number and told us to let her know if we needed anything. She told us not to be afraid and that she would do her best to help us. I requested her to keep our jewelry and academic certificates with her for safety. She agreed and told me, "Don't you worry, you will get everything back, nothing bad will happen to them." And so we did. I got all my stuff back once the country was liberated. Today she is no more, but I still feel grateful to her and fondly remember her kindness and humanity. I wish her departed soul eternal peace.

We were under strict orders to go to the mosque. So every day, my father and two brothers would go to the mosque to say their prayers. The ordeal was not that difficult for my brothers as they were young, but it took its toll on my 70 year old father. Sometimes he lamented that it would have been better to have died. He would come back from the mosque and sit quietly, his head hung in humiliation. Sometimes I would look at him, so glum and discontent, and think to myself that maybe death really was preferable to this. If this does not guarantee our safety or safe return of our loved ones, then what was the point of going through all this humiliation? What was the point of living this way?

Even after all these, we were not spared mental anguish. One of our neighbors would regularly threaten my father that we would be shot and killed in a day or two.

One day, very early in the morning, [Al-Badr](#) † surrounded our house and ransacked everything. I was really scared for my brothers. It was a regular practice for them to storm into a house, blindfold the young men, and take them away. Those who were taken away would never return.

During the month of Ramadan, about seven or eight ladies would often come uninvited and march straight into our kitchen. They would turn each and every pot and pan to check if we were fasting or not. They would torment us like this day in and day out. One day, my grandmother (my father's aunt) passed away. We could not cremate her according to our religion. We just lit a little fire and touched it to her face and buried her. She did not have any child of her own, so according to our religion it was my father's duty to perform her Shraddha (funeral rites). Dad consulted with our cleric Shibu Thakur and sought advice. He was also carrying a cross around his neck then to play along with his fake Identity Card. After hearing everything he said, "Please come to my house with everything, we will perform the funeral in my house." And indeed he did. Although he was dressed like a Christian, inside he was still the dedicated Hindu cleric. Many of Professor Sarker's friends and colleagues who lived nearby stood by us when they heard what we had been going through. They would always keep in touch and were always there for us with advice in difficult situations. They were dismayed at the news of our religious conversion. We were not able to contact them before we had converted.

One day a very old gentleman, who I thought was very affectionate to Professor Sarker, came to see me. He used to address me as 'Bou ma' (Daughter-in-law). He elaborated to me about Islam's superiority and advised me that if I could accept Islam in my heart and follow accordingly, I will be at peace and forget all my sufferings. He gave me a couple of books to read about Islam. I was shocked and dismayed at such arrogance and patronization from a man whom I had considered knowledgeable and respected like a father.

One day, a Father came to our school. He had heard all about me from Sister Helen. He told me that he wanted to ask me something if I did not mind. When I assured him, he asked me if anybody was pressuring me after changing my religion. Apparently this was all too common and some of the women were being forced into marriages. He gave me his phone number and told me to contact him immediately if such a thing ever happened to me. I was really scared after listening to him. I never told this to my parents or anyone at my home. They would have been

devastated. And so I spent my days, in my own world of terror.

Then one day a boy, about ten or eleven years old, came running to our house and told us that the [Al-Badr](#)s † were planning to capture my younger brother by that evening. He told us the name of the Al-Badr who was behind this and described his features. From the description, my brother was able to recognize him. They were from the same school. The boy told my brother, “When you were entering the house today, he was pointing at you and I heard them say that they were going to arrest you by this evening. You have to leave now!” And with that he ran away. My brother looked at me dumbstruck. What was I supposed to do? Finding no other alternative, I took him to one of my father’s friend’s house. But that house was not very safe either. My father and I went to some people whom we could ask for help but none of them were at home. The people who were at home could not provide much assurance. Some advised us to go to the Chairman of the [Peace Committee](#) †, while others advised us to go to the Imam of the big mosque. But I could not muster enough courage to do either. Despondent, we returned home. After hearing everything, our landlady came and took my brother with her. She said, “Your brother is my brother, no one can take him from me.” This illiterate woman gave us the hope and assurance that none of our educated friends could. (I should mention here, our landlord was a rickshaw puller in his early life. He worked really hard, and by being frugal, had built that house with his savings. His wife was also illiterate). But I wondered how much their compassion would hold up against the weapons of the enemies. My mother fell ill after this particular episode. I used to affectionately address one of our neighbors ‘kaka’ (uncle). Upon hearing everything, he brought that Al-Badr to our house. Taking their hands into his, the Al-Badr member promised my mother and brother that he had not and would never do such a thing. He told us that the young boy had misinformed us and he had said no such thing.

And so we went on living, terrified that death might finally catch up to us any moment.

All this time, I had not heard from Professor Sarker or my in-laws. Almost everyday, Sister Helen would ask me about their whereabouts. She was also very worried about them. She asked me if I had any relatives in India. If so, then I should write a letter to them. She told me that she would send the letter to India through her mother in France. So I wrote a letter informing all our details to my husband’s maternal uncle in Cooch Behar (India). Sister Helen sent that letter to her mother in France. Her mother then contacted my husband’s uncle. He wrote back through Sister Helen’s mother as well. From that letter, I learnt that Professor Sarker and his parents had crossed the border and were residing in Meghalaya (India), near the Mymensingh border. I did not know how to express my gratitude to Sister Helen. I just hugged her and cried my heart out. She gave the letter to me and told me, “Go home, you don’t have to teach any class today. Tell everyone the good news.” I felt as if I had found a purpose to live again. Suddenly the worry and despair seemed to recede a lot.

A few days later, Mannan (a student of my brother) came to our house and presented us a short note hidden inside his socks. Professor Sarker had written to my brother. He wrote, “We crossed the border, you should do the same. The messenger will guide you.” Next day, a similar note was brought to us by Shahtab, an artist and Professor of the Teachers’ Training College. The notes had exchanged many hands before reaching us. Professor Shahtab told us to assume that he was ‘the messenger’. So we prepared to leave. But the colleagues of Professor Sarker, Professor Golam Samdani Quraishi, Professor Reazul Islam, and even Professor Shahtab himself were not convinced. They told us, “The Mukti Bahini are advancing. Heavy fighting may break out any day now. We cannot let you leave in the face of such danger. You should go back to the village.” But we did not want to go back to the village.

Meanwhile, the Indian Air Force planes ([Allied Forces](#) †) had already bombed the city twice; it was not safe in the city either. We left town again on December 8. We went to Mannan’s house in the village of Akua on the outskirts of Mymensingh town. About an hour after we left town, a curfew was imposed and many houses were searched. We thought it was not safe in Mannan’s house; so we left for Barera village about a mile from Akua and took shelter in Mr. Azahar’s (a colleague of my elder brother) house. That night, around 11:00 p.m., heavy gunfire erupted from all directions. We spent the whole night with our backs against the mud walls of the house. The next day we heard that the military had torched their armory themselves. Early morning of December 11, some villagers beat up a few Razakars. That made the rest of the villagers very scared. Everyone was preparing to leave the village. We were also getting ready when we heard that the military was approaching. This sent everyone into a frenzy. However a little later we heard that the military had gone in another direction. Thrice during that day, we were forced to pack and flee in different directions for fear of our lives. Then came the news that the military were on the doorsteps of the village; there was no way out. We stood in silence, waiting for death to finally catch up with us. My elder brother started to cry as he took my son into his arms. He was lamenting, “Dear nephew, I failed to save you; because of my small mistake I could not reunite you with your dad.” About the same time, Mr. Azahar’s younger brother came running as he shouted, “Didi (sister), there is nothing to be scared of.” He told us that the [Punjabis](#) † (Pakistani occupation force) were looking for someone responsible to surrender to, and he had directed them towards Dapunia. And suddenly we heard the roar of ‘[Joy Bangla](#)’ † from all around us. Mymensingh was free!

We had narrowly escaped death. Words can never express what joy I felt that day. I could feel the freedom in my veins, in my being. I witnessed independence with my own eyes. The crowd rejoiced in our newly earned freedom, the air was filled with chants of ‘Joy Bangla’. People were returning to the city on trucks, buses, on foot all the while shouting ‘Joy Bangla’. I wanted to immerse myself in that wave of people. The very next day, we came back to our place in the city. Seeing us our landlady came running back, she put Sindoor on my forehead and bowed (‘pranam’) in respect. Our neighbors came to see us as well. Within moments, the pain of conversion was gone. We felt safe and content. It felt like everybody was like our own family.

The whole town was crowded with the Mukti Bahini and the members of the Sikh (Indian) Army. They set themselves up at the Collegiate School and turned it into their barracks. There they found a list created by the Al-Badr. Both of my brothers were on that list. Apparently, if we had not left town on December 8, we would have fallen victim to them.

Such was our escape from death. One by one, I would get all my loved ones back. I cannot put into words the joy and relief I felt as each one of them returned to me.

□ *Sindoor* Red cosmetic powder, traditionally worn by married Hindu women along the parting of their hair.

The Horrific Memories of '71

[Jahanara Imam](#) †

Author, Dhaka

Which is the most horrific memory of 1971? The whole period, starting from [March 25](#) † till December 15, was like living in hell. Which particular incident stands out? The dark night of March 25, when we all woke up suddenly at midnight at the ghastly wails? The night that had turned into a hellish nightmare with the terrifying sounds of heavy bombing, the rumblings of machine guns, the innumerable helpless wailing voices, the tireless barking of dogs mixed with the spiraling fire flashing in the darkness of the night? But no! That was only the beginning of hell. After that, every single day and every single night, we went through intolerable, inexplicable miseries; how do I single out just one to describe as a terrible memory?

The hellish memories flash through my mind.

I remember the morning of March 27. How can I express my shock when I saw the condition of the [Shaheed Minar](#) † after the 32 hours curfew had been withdrawn? They had tried to destroy the emblem of our existence. I was taken aback at the ruthlessness of their effort. Helpless people, scared for dear life, were huddled at the hospital for a bit of safe shelter. Streets were packed with people running away. The head of the family, who had hardly ever lifted a small load was running away that morning, holding the hands of his little boy and carrying a heavy suitcase on his head. The housewife who had never walked outside her home was fleeing barefooted, clutching her infant to her bosom. All these memories seared a scar deep inside me for good. I didn't know then what had happened at [Iqbal Hall](#) † or [Jagannath Hall](#) †. The accounts I heard from others later would give me nightmares. There was a thick puddle of dark red blood, even after four or five days, on the veranda in front of the apartment of our beloved 'Jamai Babu', [Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta](#) †. Those appalling memories have not faded still, after all these years.

After all this time, have I forgotten that aching pain I felt when Rumi* left home to join the Liberation War? The thought of his grim future set the heaviest burden on my heart and it chokes me to this day. It was the same for thousands of mothers. Terror seizes a mother along with great pride when her beloved son goes to war to save the motherland. But when that son becomes a martyr, the heartache is unfathomable.

Even today, when I recall the night when the Pakistani Army came and captured Rumi, all the neurons in my brain go numb momentarily.

But, was I living in peace even before Rumi went to the Liberation War? No. In that dreadful milieu, a young son of twenty at home was even more worrisome. Often nightmares woke me up in the middle of the night.

Just a few days after March 25, word reached us that they were listing how many young men lived in each house around the neighborhood. My heart jumped. I recalled that there were some non-Bengali boys living in a street north of the main road; Rumi had a quarrel with them a few months back. They must have put the names of Rumi and Jami on the top of the list.

I was freaked out that day. I sent Rumi and Jami to Sharif's friend's house at Gulshan right away. He also had three young sons. He too, was very anxious. A [Punjabi](#) † major lived next door to him, which was obviously more terrifying. I would keep Rumi and Jami there for a few days, then bring them back and alternately hide them in someone else's house. Just like a feline mother shifts her kittens from one position to another in her mouth.

Several days later, the government tried to portray that the situation was normal. There were instructions over the radio to join everyone's respective office. The T.V station started broadcasting again, newspapers began publishing again. I thought perhaps they would not be focusing on the young kids at homes anymore. I relaxed a bit and brought Rumi and Jami back home. But the assurance did not last long. The stories around were making me very nervous. Many people had witnessed tied up and blindfolded young men being taken away in trucks—who knows where! Why were their hands tied? Why the blindfolds? Must have been to execute them. Where had the boys been captured from? Must be from the streets or homes. In the next few days, people reported floating dead bodies with tied hands and blindfolds seen on the river Buriganga. Were those the blindfolded boys in the trucks? I grounded Rumi and Jami. Jami was obedient, as he was younger. But I could not hold back a twenty year old young man like Rumi at home. He would definitely be going out. And as long as he was out there, my heart trembled with trepidation. Those terrible memories make me go crazy even today.

As the days were passing, the accounts of brutality got even worse. They were not shooting them down anymore. They were siphoning every last drop of blood out of their bodies, and then throwing the corpses away. Numerous corpses were found on the streets with no wound on them at all. But why would they need so much blood? As the Pakistani Army were fighting with the freedom fighters in different places of the country, the number of wounded soldiers was on the rise. They needed a lot of blood for their treatment. The blood banks were exhausted. So they had taken this alternate route to collect blood. During Second World War, the Nazis used to collect blood from the captive Jews like this. Reading those incidents in books had given me the chills before. Now it was happening right in my own country.

It was not comforting at all to have a young son at home during that time.

Rumi and his friends were captured by the Pakistani Army around midnight on August 29. On that same night, around the same time, the Pakistani army raided five houses and captured many young freedom fighters: Bodi, Rumi, Chullu, Azad, Jewel, Bashar, [Altaf Mahmud](#) †, Nuhel, Kholu, Linu, Dinu, and many others. We did not know about this when the Pak Army raided our home at about 12 a.m. We were in deep sleep. Suddenly, somebody slammed on our front gate. Everybody woke up. As I peeked through the window, I saw that the military police had surrounded our house. They had come to arrest Rumi. But they did not mention that to us for once. In a perfectly normal voice, the Captain said, "It's just a routine interrogation. You all have to come to the police station. It's a matter of a few hours only." They took away all the male members of our house—Rumi, Jami, their father, and their cousin. I was all alone in that empty two storied house with my old, incapacitated, and blind father-in-law who was asleep in another room. He had no idea of what had happened and was in sound sleep.

The horrifying memory of that night still haunts me. All the men of the family were taken away in the middle of the night and I was all alone in that big mansion. The front gate was wide open, and all the houses around were dead quiet like haunted houses. Now I often wonder to myself, how am I still living and passing my days after all that had happened? The demonic torture did not end there. After two days everybody returned; Sharif, Jami, Masum, Hafiz. Everyone, except Rumi. They never mentioned, but he was the one they had come for. In the name of routine

interrogation, everyone was given a tour of the most terrible of hells. The account of their demonic torture, which I came to know about from Sharif, Jami, and Masum, surpassed the tortures of the seven levels of hell. When they took Sharif and the others to a small room in the [M.P. Hostel](#) †, they found many young freedom fighters from Dhaka there. Their fathers, uncles, and other relatives were also huddled there as captives. As I was listening to Sharif, Jami, and Masum's account of the inhumane physical abuse and profanities they had suffered, I wanted to die to escape the hatred and the insult. Jewel, Bashar, Hafiz, Alvi, Altaf Mahmud were beaten so badly that they had broken wrists, fingers, and noses, and were smeared in blood. As they could not capture freedom fighters Swapan and Ulfat, they tortured their fathers instead by tying them upside down from ceiling fans.

Rumi's father and brothers, Swapan and Ulfat's fathers and uncles, four brothers-in-law of Altaf Mahmud returned home after three or four days. Though they came back, they would never be the same. The mental scar of the torture and humiliation did not leave them. They had kicked Sharif's head with their boots; for many days after his return, he felt as if he was wearing an iron helmet. The marks of cane on his shoulder took months to fade. But it was the insult that burned him more than the physical affliction. He could not live any more with that suffocating ache and finally found peace when he died from a heart failure on December 13.

How can I describe the horrors of those memories? War had broken out everywhere in Dhaka by then and we had no idea what was happening during the curfews and blackouts. We did not know that the plot of killing the intellectuals of the country was already underway. On the evening of [December 14](#) †, some people died and some were wounded as bombs dropped on two of the houses in front of ours. The survivors brought the wounded in and took shelter in our home. Our house was used as a shelter during the air raids of the [1965 war](#) †. May be that was what everyone remembered and why they rushed in to our home. That was another added responsibility—to cook and make room for all these people. Curfew, blackout, phone service outage, blazing sound of the air-raids, planes overhead—I am not able to depict the horrors of those memories. Memories of those days still torment my heart.

All of the nine months of 1971 is one horrific, appalling agony to me.

□ *Shafi Imam Rumi* Eldest son of Jahanara Imam. He was twenty years old when he went to the war. He was a member of the [Crack Platoon](#) †, a guerilla team operating in Dhaka. He was captured on August 29. It is believed that he was executed on September 4. His body was never found.

Only Altaf Bhai Remained

Abul Barak Alvi

*Artist and Assistant Professor, Institute of Fine Arts, [University of Dhaka](#) †
[Present: Professor, Department of Printmaking, University of Dhaka]*

We entered Dhaka city during the middle of August in 1971. We had come to Dhaka thrice before, but this time we carried a lot of arms and ammunition. Fateh Ali, Baker, and Kamol were with me. We had 5 SLRs, 4 or 5 Sten guns, 10 Energa grenades, 5 or 6 boxes of bullets, and a lot of explosives. Baker was our leader.

We had fixed a date earlier to sit together and plan our next move after entering Dhaka. But Baker did not meet us on the appointed day or the two or three days following that. Having not heard from him, we decided to go back to [Melaghar](#) †. [Altaf Mahmud](#) † (music director) had made a special request to take one of his friends over the border with us. So we went to Altaf [bhai](#) 's† house to meet him and his friend and devise a plan. That was the evening of August 29.

We had to wait quite a while for the friend to arrive at Altaf bhai's place. It was pretty late. We were supposed to stay at Fateh Ali's home that night. But Altaf bhai and his family members did not let us leave that late since their home was just opposite the [Rajarbagh Police Lines](#) †. I could not sleep that night. I was thinking that Fateh would be worried about what had happened to us. I must have dozed off near dawn. Suddenly, I woke up to the sound of footsteps. It was around 4 or 5 a.m. I listened intently and realized that the sound was of heavy boots. Peeping through the curtains, I saw that the whole house had been surrounded by the Pakistani Army.

Within a few minutes, they were kicking at the doors. I was trying to figure out what to do, but by then Altaf bhai and the others were already gathering in the room. Realizing the gravity of the situation, Altaf bhai stepped forward and opened the door. They entered the room and demanded, "Who is the music director, Altaf Mahmud?"

Altaf bhai replied, "I am."

They immediately hit him on the chest with a rifle. Altaf bhai whimpered from the sudden pain. They searched every room. They beat us and gathered us in the veranda outside. They brought someone down from their Jeep and took him to the backyard with Altaf bhai, (since I did not know that person well, I cannot confirm his identity, but according to others, it was Mr. Samad from 'Neon Signs').

They ordered Altaf bhai and that other person to dig up the ground behind the house. Within a few minutes, they unearthed a huge trunk full of arms. They seized the arms, then arrested us along with Altaf bhai's brothers-in-law Nuhel, Dinu, Linu, Khonu, their neighbors Mr. Naser and Mr. Rasul, and three others who lived upstairs. All of us were then taken to the [M.P. Hostel](#) † on Airport road (near the old Parliament Building). A military court had been established there at that time. They ordered us to make a line and beat us there for some time.

Then they took us to another house. At the entrance, there were some more prisoners. I even recognized a few of them. They put us in a seven feet by eight feet room. It was probably an unused bathroom or kitchen. There was a window with grills overhead. Some people were already in the room, a couple of others joined later.

I did not look at anyone for a long time. I did not wish to find any more familiar faces. But I had to look at one point. There were my

childhood friend Jewel, Jahanara Apa's ([Jahanara Imam](#) † - Editor) son Rumi (refer to the previous narration by Jahanara Imam - Editor), Chullu bhai, Belayet bhai, Azad, Mr. Razzaque (uncle of Habibul Alam) and his son Mizanur Rahman, Mr. Shamsul Haque (Swapan's father), Mr. Aziz Us Samad (Ulfat's father), Mr. Hafiz of Dhaka TV, and Mr. Bashir of 'Morning News'. I did not know many of them at that time, but later I came to know who they were.

One by one, they called us into the next room for interrogation. The door in between the rooms was sometimes shut and sometimes half-open. We could easily hear the sound of screams and groans of the person being interrogated. Sometimes we could even see what was happening through the half-open door. The torture was so intense and horrible that if you were to have any information they wanted, you were sure to confess. At one point, they called for Altaf bhai. I listened keenly. He did not confess to anything except hiding the trunk in his backyard. He told them that Mr. Samad, his friend, had asked him to keep the trunk hidden. He had no clue about the arms in it. He had not asked about the contents. He also did not let anyone at his home know about the trunk. Altaf bhai kept repeating the same thing. When he returned after his interrogation, he had blood all over his body.

Finally my turn came. I heard someone yell, "*Alvi kaun hain?* ... Who is Alvi?"

I was shocked as they were hardly calling people by their names and they had no reason to know my name! I wondered where they had known my name from. Surely someone must have told them. But who could that be?

Everyone's eyes were on me. After thinking a while, I stood up. The first question to me was, "*Tum Alvi?* ... Are you Alvi?"

There was no point in denying that. And then there came a barrage of questions, "When did you enter from India?"

"Who were the other people that came with you?"

"What arms have you carried?"

"Where have you kept them?" etc.

I replied that I had never been to India.

They became furious. Then started the brutal torture. But I kept answering the same thing. What happened next really frightened me. They sent for Baker, our missing team leader. They also produced a list of the weapons we had brought, along with the names of the four of us. I saw everything was accurate and realized that they already knew everything. But still, I decided to deny it all.

Baker came. They asked him pointing at me, "Is this Alvi? Baker only nodded yes. He was sent back.

I was at my wit's end. How could he do that? Then I reasoned that they must have tortured Baker mercilessly. Maybe that is why I was not angry with him. They asked me if I was ready to confess it all. I realized that there was no escape from death. Whether I confessed or not, I would be killed. So I decided to deny everything.

I said that I did not know him, I had never seen him; he must be making a mistake. They intensified the torture, threatened to kill me. They even tried bribing me. But I did not give in. The officer in front of me was so frustrated that he crumpled the piece of paper in front of him and threw it into the corner. Then he ordered the soldiers in Urdu, "*Saale ko leke jao. Acche kar ke banao* ... Take this scoundrel away. Teach him a good lesson." The soldiers took me to another room. I can never describe the torture I had to endure. Let me just say this—the muscles in my arms, legs, body were torn apart and blood gushed out and soaked my shirt and pants. It seemed to me that my jaws and fingers were broken. My whole body became numb—I could not feel anything. All through the night, they tortured me but I stuck to my story.

Later, at the dead of night, they took us to the Ramna Police Station. I realized that there was no hope of surviving at all. The faces of my mother, father, and dear ones flashed in front of my eyes. But the whole way, I kept thinking about how I could escape.

They handed us over to the Ramna Police Station authority with a list of our names. In the list of captives, I wrote my name as Syed Abul Barak. I did not write 'Alvi' because almost everyone, especially Baker, knew me only as 'Alvi'. I should mention that I never saw Baker again after that day. The soldiers left us in the cell. As soon as they left, the prisoners, who were already there, became very busy. Like magic, they produced some medicine and started nursing us. They managed some food for us, even cigarettes. (I could not eat anything because I was not able to grip with my hand and there was a terrible pain in my jaws). I will never forget the kindness shown to us that night; everyone in that room felt like my own family.

Later that night, I first told Altaf bhai and then the others about my plan. We came to the conclusion that even if I managed to skip around the 'Alvi' part from my name, still the question remained of what I was doing at that house. The only way was to introduce myself as a relative or close acquaintance. That is why I got oriented with the names of all the close relatives of Altaf bhai's family and what they did.

Next day, they took us back to the M.P. Hostel, but this time to a different house. We were kept in a large room while the interrogation took place in another room. This time, they were calling everyone from a list or report they had. At one point, they called Altaf Mahmud and all of his family members, but not me. I thought that it would be more risky for me if I did not go with them then. So I asked, "I am with them, why did you not call my name?"

He asked my name. I replied, "Syed Abul Barak." He checked his papers. Not finding anything about me in the papers, he asked, "Why were you captured?"

I said, "I don't know anything. I was just visiting his house, so they also picked me up with the rest of the family."

He looked at me, thought for a while, and then decided to interrogate me with Altaf bhai and the rest of the family. I sensed that this man had no paper or any document against me; so I decided to make most of the opportunity. These were all senior officers, none from the previous day was present. Nonetheless, we were tortured and interrogated again; but this time, I was able to establish myself as a guest of the family. Maybe after seeing my small size and bloodstained body, they took a little pity on me as well. I did not miss this opportunity. They asked me a lot of questions, tried to threaten me, and even tempt me. They told me that since most freedom fighters were my age, I must have a few friends among them. If I named a few, they would let me go. They asked about my job, where I worked and all. Before the war, I had been working as a government employee in the 'Film and Publication' department. I told them that I was busy at work every day; how was I supposed to know who was a freedom fighter. They then asked for my work telephone number. I was alarmed but gave the number anyway. Thankfully, nothing bad happened. Then I felt like lightning had struck me as I saw a soldier entering the interrogation room. He was present the previous day when Baker had identified me and also when I was being tortured. For a moment, I thought that everything was lost.

Luckily, nothing happened. I was surprised when the soldier remained quiet. I had to swear upon the Quran to prove my innocence.

On August 31, all of us except Altaf bhai were set free. The same soldier (he was probably a [Subedar](#) †) escorted us through the gate. To my utter surprise, he patted me on the back and advised me to consult a good physician.

The world outside seemed dazzlingly bright to me, everything felt new! I don't know how I managed to walk to the airport (Old Tejgaon

airport). While we waited for some transport, suddenly a car braked beside us and opened the door for me. I was startled to find Nimra's (actress and wife of Tariq Anam, another actor and theater artist) father inside. He used to live just opposite of Altaf bhai's house at the time.

I remained in Dhaka for a few days to recover from my injuries. I had to shift from house to house while I was there. After recovering a little, I returned to Melaghar.

An Unmarked Corpse

Abdur Rauf Sikder

Businessman, Dinajpur

My decision to join the war was taken all of a sudden. On the night of [March 25](#) †, I went to the Kamalapur Railway station to get on the train to Dinajpur. It was almost 10 p.m. Many passengers like me were waiting.

All of a sudden, someone, probably the station master, rushed out and said that the Pakistan Army's operation had begun; no train would be leaving the platform that night. He said, "There's severe firing at Rajarbagh! If you all wish to live, flee! Escape while you can, however you can." Many did so but, like me, a lot of people who had nowhere to go were stuck in the station. Around 1 a.m., a fire-truck came. Using its ladder, we climbed to the roof of the station. From up there, we witnessed the resistance and the battle at the [Rajarbagh Police Lines](#) †. I saw the Pakistani Army firing upon and killing the people who tried to escape from the restaurants in front of the station as well.

On the next day around 3 p.m., the heat was becoming unbearable on the rooftop. I jumped on the roof of a freight train. Just as I was entering the wagon, I was apprehended by the army. There were numerous dead bodies scattered all around the station. However, those of us captured during the day turned out to be very lucky as we were not shot. They kicked us out of the station instead, saying, "Get lost if you wish to live." At that time, I was not familiar with the streets of Dhaka. I walked to [The Ittefaq](#) † office, probably through Mugdapara. It was not dark yet. I saw before me the demolished Ittefaq office; I saw someone carrying out a burnt dead body from the ashes.

On March 27, I went to Sadarghat*, from there to Jinjira, then to Shatnol, and finally reached Barisal. I did not have any idea what had happened to my home at South Balubari, Dinajpur town, or where my family was. I started for Dinajpur on foot from Barisal (*The narrator had to flee to Barisal, which is in the southern part of the country, but his home was in Dinajpur, the northern part of the country. People had to flee anywhere they could – Editor*). I was caught with some others by the Pakistani Army on April 15 in Kushtia. They took us to the Police Lines there. After we had been subjected to brutal torture, an officer let us go. He said he was freeing us because when the real 'terrorists' were getting away then there was no point in hurting the innocents. From his looks I guessed he was not a [Punjabi](#) †.

In the Kushtia Police Lines, I had a terrible experience, which was more mortifying than my own torture sessions. A girl was captured while fleeing to India. As punishment, one side of her face was cut away in such a horrific manner that her teeth were exposed through the gash, like a poster that hangs at a dentist's chamber. After seeing that, I gave up the plan of returning home in Dinajpur. I crossed the border from Tatibond village, Kushtia and went to Bongaon in West Bengal, India. They let me go from the Police Lines on April 16 and I reached Bongaon on April 19.

At Bongaon camp, we were first trained under Parimal Kumar Dey. After Mr. Dey, we were placed under Major Jalil (Commander of [Sector](#) † 9) at first, then under Major Manzoor (Commander of Sector 8). Our first successful operation was at Narail, in the month of May. We were almost 75 in number. After the operation, I took a leave and went to Kolkata, India to meet Professor Yusuf Ali, the [Awami League](#) † leader from Dinajpur (my hometown). He was the honorary Secretary General in the ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation of the [Bangladesh Government in Exile](#) † at that time. I asked him about my father. He assured me that my family was at Gangarampur of West Dinajpur. Professor Yusuf Ali knew my father Dil Muhammad, the confectioner. My parents did not know where I was or even if I was alive. They were unaware of my joining the [Mukti Bahini](#) †. When I finally met them, I chose not to tell them. If they had known, I am sure my mother would have never let me go back to the war even if I had somehow managed my father's approval. So I told them that I was going to Kolkata for a vacation and I joined [Swadhin Bangla Betar](#) † as a peon. I worked there from June to July. Then I came back to Sector 8 in July. It was from here that I returned to the war in August and became a 'corpse'.

Let me state in the beginning that I have little recollection of my terrible ordeal because I was pronounced 'dead'. In July, we carried out a successful operation in Jhenidah. But on August 13, a traitor would cost us dearly. We did not know that there was a [Razakar](#) † in our team. He informed the Pakistanis beforehand that we had taken up our position at Kauar Chor in Barisal. Two officers of the [Bengal Regiment](#) † were our leaders. It was 12 p.m. when the Pakistani Army suddenly surrounded Kauar Chor. There was only one way out of the Chor. But it was too late. We watched helplessly as one by one each of us was shot down by the enemy's brush fire.

I don't remember much after that. I have pieced together the rest of what follows next from the accounts of another survivor of that battle, my father, my doctor, and my nurse. Both my legs were shot. Those who were badly injured, were taken to Bongaon at first. After first aid Treatment there, we were transferred to Kolkata Military Hospital. The doctors tried their best but they saw no hope for my survival. So they sent me to Kolkata Medical College Hospital. By that time, my right leg had been amputated from the knee. Blood circulation was cut off from my left leg, gangrene was setting in. When replacing a vein from my left heel did not work, a plastic vein was inserted in my left thigh to keep the blood circulating in my left foot artificially.

During all this, I remained in a comatose state. When the doctors of Kolkata Medical College had given up on me as well, I came back to my senses for a few moments. I recall seeing the nurse near my head and when she leaned in to see me regain consciousness, I remember informing her of my address, my father's name, occupation, and requesting her to inform Professor Yusuf Ali about me. I kept my senses just long enough to speak clearly; then I lost my consciousness again. Prof. Yusuf Ali informed my father in Gangarampur.

News was sent by the film director Mr. Fazlul Haque. By the time my father reached the hospital, I had been declared 'dead' and been placed in the morgue. After a hectic search, when my father had lost all hope of finding me, a hospital staff suggested to look among the unidentified dead bodies. He found me there. When he saw me lying like a corpse, he broke down in tears. At that moment, Professor A. K. Banerjee, an Orthopedics doctor, was passing by him. He was originally from Barisal. He was kind to my father and asked to check the 'dead

body'. At the time, there was immense love and affection among the general population of both Bengals (India and Bangladesh) towards the freedom fighters. Later, Dr. Banerjee told me that he did not get my pulse but upon examining my tongue and eyes he could tell that I was alive.

On December 2, [Indira Gandhi](#) †, the Prime Minister of India, and [Colonel Osmani](#) † (later General), the Commander-in-Chief of our Mukti Bahini, came to visit the injured freedom fighters. There, Mrs. Gandhi stated that Bangladesh would be independent by that month. It made me cry in happiness.

I am still alive but without my right leg, with a plastic vein in my left leg, and countless scars from the torture at the Kushtia Police Lines.

I feel blessed to be alive. But the joy of being alive is sometimes overshadowed by the loss of my dear friends, my fellow freedom fighters (more than a hundred of them) who were killed at Kauar Chor on that fateful day.

□ *Sadarghat* Dhaka City riverfront, located in the southern part of Dhaka, on the river Buriganga. Sadarghat water terminal is one of the largest and busiest river ports in the country .

A Victim of Bayonet

K. M. G. Mustafa

Artist; Deputy Designer, Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC), Dhaka

As a show of their 'valor', the Pak Army animals torched a whole village, destroyed a family—all because of a single shot from a 303 rifle. This was not my only experience of their brutality; there are several others that still send chills down my spine.

I heard that my mother along with my sister had set out from my brother-in-law's work station in Faridpur. Somehow, they managed to cross the mighty river Padma on a tiny boat carrying chili peppers and reached our own village Bhodroghat in Sirajganj.

On the other hand, my elder brother, who was the Principal of Govt. Azizul Haque College, Bogra, was missing with his entire family. The college itself and his government-allocated residence had been turned into the Pakistani [cantonment](#) †. I was in Dhaka. Compared to the rest of the country, Dhaka was kept as normal as possible—to keep up appearances in front of the foreign journalists.

I wondered what I should do. Where should I go with my three children? The border was put on high alert. There was news pouring in from all over the country that the Pakistani Army was killing the Bangalis who were trying to flee from the country. After a lot of thinking, I realized that it would be impossible to leave the country. I decided that if I had to die then I would die at home. Then at least someone would be able to identify my dead body.

I cannot remember the exact date but, as far as I recall, it was the first week of September. I reached Kamalapur Railway Station with just a [lungi](#) † and an umbrella with a new wooden handle to go to my village and get some news of my mother. The lungi was wrapped in an old Urdu newspaper.

There was no fixed timetable for the trains. Trains would only leave when the so called authorities gave the orders. I saw that four empty compartments had been attached at the front of the engine to protect it in case of any explosion during the journey. It was raining heavily outside. Finally the train departed at 5 p.m. Until dusk set in, I could spot the invaders patrolling the bridges at regular intervals. Their waists had been tied with shackles that were locked to the fishplates so that they could not flee even if the [Mukti Bahini](#) † attacked.

The train slowly entered the Jagannathganj docks early at dawn. Everyone was looking out to see what was going on outside. I did too. A chill went down my spine. Ten or twelve Bangalis were standing beside the river bank, their hands tied behind their backs... and then...

I could not look any longer. I heard the sound of gunfire. Those people, alive a moment ago, turned into corpses and fell into the water. They were soon lost, dragged away by the current. Everyone was silent. It was as if none had witnessed anything; nothing had happened.

We boarded the ferry. A few of us were standing by the railing. Someone advised us to go inside, "Don't stand here. It's not wise to stand here."

Later on, a very old man boarded the ferry. He was wearing only a torn lungi folded up to his knees; his upper body was bare. Old age made him hunch forward as he walked. Under his arm, there was an oil-smeared pillow wrapped in a ragged blanket. He also had a sickle wrapped in a piece of rug in his hand. He was headed for Ningachi to find some work as a day laborer. "What's under your arm? Let me see what's in your hand," asked a soldier in Urdu.

The old man put down his pillow on the deck and handed the sickle to the butcher. When he saw the sharp sickle, his eyes were red with fury. Holding the old man's head with his left hand, he tried its sharpness against the old man's neck. Blood dripped down the old man's chest. The old man remained silent, calm. We all moved back a few paces. Gallantly, the soldier tore up the old man's pillow and threw it overboard into the water.

An armed officer with stars on his uniform appeared. He had a bald head and pox marks on his face. Having guessed what had transpired, he slapped the brutal soldier hard across his face. It all seemed hypocritical. The soldier managed to regain his composure, stood upright, and saluted him with a 'Sir'. Around 2 p.m., the ship left the port. There was a curfew on the Jamuna. There were no other boats. I had to starve the whole day.

Finally, we arrived at Sirajganj ghat (river terminal). But none of the restaurants around the ghat were open. I learned that the restaurants had not been opened for several days. It was already 6 p.m. I would have to walk to my village which was at least six miles away.

Leaving the ghat, I walked through the town. It will take me a while to give a description of what I saw there, so I better not do it here now.

It was already dark by the time I reached home. There was an eerie silence. I figured that it would be difficult for my mother to get something for me to eat that late at night. So, on my way, I bought a kilogram of mutton with only 75 cents from Shialkol haat (village market).

During my walk, I found a few companions who were returning from the bazaar. Some recognized me, some did not, while a few pretended not to and walked on quietly. Even from a distance, I could see the lights flickering in my home. I almost ran the rest of the path and hugged my mother. She burst into tears. She had received news that my elder brother had left with his family from Bogra by a bullock-cart for some unknown village. Nobody had heard anything since. My mother became busy. She wanted to cook the meat I had brought with me. I stopped her saying, "I'll eat whatever you have for now. You can cook the meat tomorrow morning." After starving for a whole day I forgot my fatigue with the food I ate and the joy of having my mother beside me.

I went to sleep hoping that I could have a long chat with my mother in the morning. I slept till 4.30 a.m. at a stretch. I woke up and went out for a walk in the half-darkness by the river which flowed by the boundary of our house.

BANG!!! Serenity was shattered in an instant. This was an all too familiar sound. I had heard it repeatedly on the black night of [March 25](#) †.

Machine guns, Sten guns, and Chinese rifles were being fired all at once. I ran to my mother and told her, "Get up quickly! They have attacked the village." My aunt and cousins were in the next room. There was no time to think. Crossing the shallow river with my mother, aunt, younger sister Lily, and a pregnant cousin, Rekha, I hurried to Dumur-rekha, on the other end of the river bar, where my elder sister Moyna's house was.

As the day wore on, I saw our village burning. From a distance, I guessed that uncle Reboti's house was on fire. He was my father's friend. His step brother Romen was my friend. Everyone in the village adored him. We were very close. Pretty soon, almost all the villagers came to Dumur-rekha crossing the river. They said that Moser Sarker of Dhamkol, a well-wisher of my father, had been murdered with his entire family by the Pak Army.

This was the first attack on a village in Sirajganj. A young man had protested in the first hours of night by firing a 303 rifle. And as revenge, they had burnt the village down and murdered innocent people.

The savage invaders gathered on the docks of the river Nolka. They were about to head for either Raiganj or Pabna. Everyone was starving. How much could Moyna do alone? My twelve year old cousin risked his life and went to the village to get some leftover stale rice and jackfruits. A little while later, he returned unharmed.

After eating in the afternoon, I went out to look for a boat to take my mother and younger sister Lily to her in-laws' village at Bheomara, which was ten miles to the north. I found a boat and we set out that very night. Next evening, we reached Bheomara. It was a very remote area. There was hardly any road to get there. It seemed like a safer place.

The night passed in anxiety. Early next morning, I started for Sirajganj river terminal on foot intending to return to Dhaka. My mother and sister stayed back. Lily's mother-in-law sent a man to escort me up to the dock and gave two jackfruits for my children. It was about eleven miles to the dock. Trudging through muddy roads in the heat and rain, I eventually reached the ghat (river terminal) at 10 a.m. This was too much for me; I was completely exhausted.

I met one of my relatives at the ghat. He informed me that the army were coming by a local train from Ishwardi; they would search all the passengers and only then the ship would start. He was my uncle and the ticket checker of the ghat. He also told me that there was a train from Jagannathganj to Jamalpur and after that I would have to take a bus. Only through all this hassle could I return to Dhaka.

The train from Ishwardi was late. Standing on the pontoon, we discussed many things including the attack on our village. We exchanged information about the whereabouts of our relatives. A few of the sailors joined us. Everyone was scared. Considering the severity of the situation, I returned the jackfruits with the man who had accompanied me from Bheomara. After that, there was nothing more to do but wait for the train to come from Ishwardi. The train came to the terminal without any passengers. There were only 25 to 30 Pakistani soldiers aboard. Their leader was a captain. He had a revolver on his waist, a pair of binoculars around his neck, a Sten gun on his shoulder, and sunglasses on his eyes. He seemed restless—alert and suspicious of everything. We could not see his eyes. There was no telling who or what he was looking at.

There were only fifty to sixty passengers on the dock, quietly waiting for the search to begin. You could hear a pin drop in that silence.

The checking began. They interrogated each one of us in Urdu, "*Keya naam...* What's your name? Where are you going? Where are you coming from? Where do you live?" The questions were very random; they seemed to be asking whatever they could think of.

When they came to me, there were two other passengers who had been brought from their seats. They looked worried. Their heads were bowed and they were staring at the ground.

"What's your name?"

I told them my name.

"Where are you going?"

"Dhaka."

"Where are you coming from?"

"Bhadroghat."

"When did you come from Dhaka?"

"Three or four days ago."

He took off his black shades. I could see his fiery eyes. He checked me from head to toe. On the shoulder of my white shirt, I had a long reddish stain from the new handle of the umbrella. I had not shaved in a couple of days. My pant was a bit torn; I had fell from a motorcycle a few days ago in Dhaka.

The evidence was clear, he decided that I was the guy who had arrived from Dhaka four days ago and fired from the 303 rifle. He beckoned at me and said, "Come."

I stood up.

He went up the stairs first, with the three of us following him. I was the last one. The anchor had been raised and the ship was gradually moving away from the pontoon. One of the sailors whom I had just met earlier tugged at my shirt and whispered to me, "Sir, don't go upstairs. Whomever they take to the upper deck, they charge them with bayonets and then throw them into the river."

I was stunned for a moment. The ship had already moved quite a distance from the pontoon by then. Without a second thought, I jumped

into the deep waters of the Jamuna. I found something like a rope hanging from the ship and held on to it with all my might. The ship was heading upstream. I continued like this for about two hundred yards. My relative had observed everything and was following me from the banks of the river. All of a sudden, something large from above fell into the water near me. I saw the water turn red. I realized that one of the men taken with me had been charged with a bayonet and thrown overboard. My hands became numb and the rope slipped away from my grip.

I let go of my body and drifted downstream with the current. The ship headed upstream on its own way. I was trying to get back to the river bank. Finally my feet found land. I could not lift up my whole body. And then I saw my relative running towards me.

I do not remember anything afterwards...

They Were Dragged Down From the Bus

Nasrat Shah

Writer, Dhaka

One day, out of the blue, the fighter jets of the Pakistani Air Force started firing and bombing indiscriminately at the heart of Barisal city. There were a lot of casualties. There were rumors that the military were on their way to capture the city on board the Babar Steamer. The inhabitants started to fly the Pakistani Flag from their homes—some did willingly, some did it out of fear. Most of the people started to flee the city in panic.

During the night, our parents decided that it would not be possible for us to align with the [Razakars](#) † and Pakistan sympathizers; so we had to leave for the village.

None of us could sleep that night. At the crack of dawn, we started for the village taking whatever belongings we could carry. When we reached our home near the Tarki port by the river, we were exhausted and famished. We had almost reached the limit of our strength because we had children and the elderly with us.

We slept in turns at the village home. Since the main road (highway) of the District Board had been dug up and blocked with logs, we suspected that the military might attack us from the river. So someone always had to be on the lookout.

Two days later the Pakistani Sabre jets flew over the port shooting randomly and dropping bombs. Although the port did not suffer much damage, a few of the betel leaf boats were destroyed. There were also quite a few injuries. People living around the port and nearby areas fled in search for safe haven. Since my third eldest uncle was a well-known doctor in the city the relatives of the injured people brought them to our house. My uncle was also on the hit list of Bangladeshi Intellectuals to be killed (*refer to [December 14](#) † in the Glossary - Editor*). He had survived by escaping from the city hospital at the last moment. All the family members helped my uncle with stitching up the wounds, applying medicine, and bandaging the injured. The supply of medicine was not a problem since our family owned the largest pharmacy in the port. Then one day, around midnight we received information that the military were coming. The local Pakistan supporters came by our house and ordered us to raise the Pakistani flag. They also forbade us from providing medical treatment to non-Muslims.

It took the elders in the family little time to figure out that we were about to face a host of dangers. So they decided to move to a remote village named Bangeela. We loaded the necessary quantity of medicine and other supplies on a boat and waited for dawn to break. We were so anxious, we could hardly wait. Around noon, we reached the remote village of Bangeela. It was surrounded by Beel (low lands submerged under water from the monsoon) on three sides and with paddy fields, muddy roads and a large jungle on the other side. We felt it was a safer place.

At night we used to listen to the [Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra](#) †. It would invigorate us as we made plans on how we were going to fight the military with just the two guns we had in the house. We had also dug up a trench in the jungle if we had to escape at the last moment. It was covered in thick bushes, making it impossible to detect the presence of the secret chamber. The question was whether we would be able to reach it when the military arrived.

In reality, that plan never did work. A few days later when we were all having lunch, we heard gunshots and saw raging flame and thick black smoke approaching us from the east. Suddenly, panic set in; you could hear the cries of desperation. The air smelled of gunpowder. The Pak military were coming towards us. We ran outdoors in different directions, unsure of our destination. Everyone was running; people really did not know where they were going. Men, women, the elderly, everyone was saying only one thing, "They're here."

The military burnt village after village and killed many before returning to their camp in the afternoon. We returned to our home in the evening from our different hideouts, but our youngest sister was missing. In the confusion, she had gotten lost. There were tears in everyone's eyes. I could not even face my mother. But fortunately, in the early hours of the morning, my sister returned. In the commotion, she had gotten attached to another group of people. Seeing her lost and weeping, those people had brought her back when she told them our address.

When we returned, we were quite surprised to find our house still standing among the many burnt and demolished houses around it. Since it was surrounded by the Beel on three sides and the jungle on the other, it was left unscathed. As night set in, the injured poured into our house. All the family members helped out my uncle with their treatment—stitching up the wounds, bandaging, applying the medicine, and heating the water. The village population started to dwindle—only a few brave souls remained. Even in those times, we would see strangers visit our house and secretly converse with the elders. We also got a few patients with gunshot wounds. It was not hard to guess that these men were from the [Mukti Bahini](#) † and they were getting medical treatment at our house.

One night, all the young men and children in the house had their heads shaved and were made to wear caps. Then all of us started for the port in the dark of the night. My maternal uncle, Manik, my immediate elder brother, and I took a boat loaded with straw and we hid the two guns underneath its deck. We were in a canal when morning arrived. As we made a few turns and approached the bridge on the District Board Road, we heard a gunshot. A bullet whistled past my uncle's ear. My heart skipped a beat. There was a tent over the bridge. A few Razakars and military folks were waving at us to dock the boat on the bank.

Had the military and Razakar somehow guessed that we had guns in the boat? I felt a strange shiver down my body. But my uncle and brother did not lose their courage. They docked the boat under the bridge. Two Razakars and two soldiers came down. One of them asked in Urdu, "Where are you coming from at such an early hour?"

My brother replied, “*Beel se ata hun...* We are coming from the Beel.” The other military now asked, “Why?” This time my uncle replied in broken Urdu, “We went to cut grass to feed the cows.” Thus my uncle and brother tried to convince them that we were poor people that worked in the farms and we cut grass in the beels as fodder for the cattle. They tried to portray us as devout Muslims who were completely unaware of the Mukti Bahini. After much persuasion, the soldiers were almost convinced to let us go, but the Razakars intervened. They asked, “What do you have in your boat?” They jumped on board the boat and searched through the grass, poking through the bundles with their rifles. We were scared to death that they would stumble upon the two hidden guns at any moment and that would mean certain death for us. I was considering whether jumping into the canal would be a plausible route of escape. But in the end, somehow we did not get caught as the two soldiers on the bridge called for the two Razakars to abandon the search. Still trembling from the event, we picked up the scattered grass onto the boat and started off. If only they had moved two more bundles of grass they would have found the guns.

Our stay at the house near the Tarki port was very risky indeed. We had to spend the whole day like prisoners with the doors locked from the outside. We could only have a walk in the open once night set in. We had to be cautious because the military often patrolled the area with the Razakars and even ventured into the villages through the village paths. They would often arrest a couple or more people suspecting them as Mukti Bahini. And whenever they came across a young woman they liked, they would carry her off to the camp. Sometimes when you saw the dead bodies that floated down the river, the sheer inhumanity and cruelty would rip your heart.

One day, we noticed that neither the military nor the Razakars had been coming to the area for the last few days. So, we deemed it was safe enough for us to use the back door of the house without being spotted. The Pakistani supporters from the port and its surrounding area kept our living in that house a secret because they would also benefit by taking medical treatment and other services from us. All that changed one day. People started to flee as the military docked at the port and advanced towards our house. Some of us hid in the attached toilet, some in the taro fields near the house. At the sight of some women’s laundry hung to dry in the sun outside, two soldiers halted before our house. My grandfather, who was an elderly religious man and always had a muslim-cap on his head, was sitting at the entrance. He welcomed them with the customary Muslim salutation and offered them to take a seat. The soldiers asked him, “It looks like the house is locked and empty, but why are there women’s clothes drying outside?” With great effort, my grandfather explained that everyone had gone on vacation and he had instructed the servants to take care of their dirty laundry. I suppose God was on our side that day; they left after a drink of water without searching inside the house. All fifteen members of our family including the women who were hiding behind the walls were saved for that day.

There was no guarantee someone would not spill our information to the military camp soon. So it was decided that all of us were to move back to town. Some people had already returned to town. Besides, the government was trying to portray a state of normalcy to the outside world, so the tortures had lessened a little in the towns. Public transportation had resumed. We decided to break into small groups and take the bus to the town. We would not have been able to avoid the military if we made the journey on foot, as they had by then infiltrated even into the remote places.

It was September 28. With fear in our hearts and God in our prayers, a few of our groups made our way to town. I was travelling with my second eldest sister and grandfather. Although my sister was quite young she was dressed in a [Burqa](#) †, fully covering her face and seated next to the driver of the bus, pretending to be his relative. I sat with my grandfather at the very back. I was wearing a [panjabi](#) † and a half pant with a muslim-cap. My grandfather, whose hair and beard were as white as a cloud, was also wearing a panjabi, a [lungi](#) † and a Muslim cap. He had an aura of calmness about him.

As the bus moved on, we passed the military and the Razakars guarding the bridges. Each time we crossed a bridge and approached a guard posts, our hearts would thump with fear. As soon as we passed one, we would let out a sigh of relief, but there were plenty more bridges ahead.

As we approached the bridge on the river Gauri, the palpitations began again. The college next to the bridge was a large camp for the military. The camp was infamous for the murders and torture that took place there. Its atrocities are talked about till this day. The military and the Razakars in that camp had done every imaginable act of rusesomeness. The bus drove past the guards on the bridge. We were about to breathe a sigh of relief when the guards whistled to stop the bus. As the bus came to a stop, I felt my heart stop in terror. Two military men and a few Razakars approached the bus. Boarding the bus, they took a look at all the passengers. Then they started searching everyone’s luggage. My throat had gone dry; I could hear the thumping in my heart. I started saying all the prayers that I could remember. At the end of the search, they dragged a few passengers down with them. They asked them something and told them to drop their pants or lungi to show their circumcision as a proof of being Muslim. Then they started interrogating them about the Mukti Bahini. However, they soon lost their patience and started cursing at the hapless men. They shoved three men towards the open field by the camp. The three men cried and begged for mercy. But they did not pay any heed to them and kicked them all the way to the bank of the canal. All the passengers on board the bus were witnesses to this horrific scene. Stunned and silent, they looked on with terror. Everyone knew that taking someone over there meant that they were going to be killed. That canal had washed away many dead bodies to the river. As soon as the three men reached near the bank, the soldiers opened fire. We did not even hear any last scream from those unfortunates, only the rat-tat-tat of the guns. We could only see from a distance how the men writhed in pain like wounded birds before their bodies rolled down into the canal. I had never witnessed such harrowing killings before. I did not even notice when the bus had started to move again.

If my memory has not fooled me, I think I have seen one of those three men pulling a rickshaw in town after independence. He had only one arm. I spotted him even a few years ago. I wish I could ask him how he survived that day. But I never overcame the horror in my heart to ask him that.

In the Depths of the Padma

Abdul Latif Selim

Businessman, Pabna, Bangladesh

Since my childhood, I was very much a daredevil and also a good swimmer. I was a four time champion in swimming from 1967 to 1970 in East Pakistan.

On [March 25](#) †, 1971 when the Pakistan Army started their carnage of murders in different parts of the country, war broke out in Pabna town as well. The Pakistan Army was defeated on March 28. But on April 10, they again took control of Pabna town. This time they were extensively brutal on the civilian population. In order to save our motherland from the Pakistan military, I went to India to get combat training from the [Mukti Bahini](#) † in the second week of April.

I first started training at Kechuadanga (India), then I went to Balurghat (India), and later on moved to a training center in Panighata in the Bihar province of India. After the successful completion of my military training, I returned to Pabna on August 8, 1971. Unfortunately, I was arrested by the group of Naxalites* who were opposed to the liberation of Bangladesh.

They were working in unison with political parties like [Jamaat-e-Islami](#) †, Nizam-e-Islam, [Muslim League](#) †, and Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP) to protect the unity of Pakistan. I was handed over to the Pak military camp. Consequently, I was subjected to terrible torture. Despite their brutal torture, I did not divulge any information regarding the Mukti Bahini. On August 21, they put me in a vehicle and brought me to my home. They searched all of our rooms and took away all of my sports certificates.

A Pakistani soldier asked me something in [Punjabi](#) † that sounded like, “*Tumi aai accha hai na ... It's good to live here, right?*”

I did not understand what he said.

Then he explained that if I did not disclose the whereabouts of the Mukti Bahini, they would burn down my home. Still I told them that I did not know anything. Then Major Mir Nawaz of the 12th Punjab Regiment, ordered, “*Jala do e saale ko ghar ... Burn down this scoundrel's house.*”

They set fire to my house in front of me. They brought me back to their torture camp. The adjutant of the 12th Punjab Regiment checked all of my certificates which they had collected from my room. He asked me in Punjabi, “*Tum boxing me bhi accha hai...* Are you good at boxing?” I replied that I had had been a junior division champion... He went on to say, “*Hum vi ye regiment mein first hai, tum humara sath larega...* I too am the champion of the regiment. So will you fight with me?”

I quickly thought to myself that for the last five days they had been torturing me inhumanely. And this was at least a chance to hit one of them back. If I were to land one blow, my life would mean something.

“*Mouka dega to jarur larega...* If I get a chance then why not,” I replied.

Having heard my reply, the adjutant named Taher told me, “*Jarur mouka denge tumko...* Of course we will give you a chance.”

Taher told a soldier to tie my hands tightly behind my back and then he started to hit me with a flurry of punches on my chest.

“*Mard ho to mard ka tarah lariye, ye to aurat ka tarah laarti hai...* If you are a true man then have the guts to fight like one. You are fighting like a woman,” I screamed.

On hearing this, he stopped punching and asked, “Where is the Mukti Fouz (Mukti Bahini) and give us their names.”

As usual I replied, “I don't know.”

Then they started beating me again. I was beaten indiscriminately all over for about an hour. When I could not take it anymore, I collapsed to the ground. Two Pak soldiers pulled me up and locked me in a room. The torture went on for another two days. At last, I was set free on September 23. But risking my life, I played one last trick on them. I declined my freedom and requested them to give me shelter for the night. I told them if I left the camp, I would be hunted down and killed by the Naxalites and [Al-Badr](#) † forces out of their personal grudge against me. I guess Major Mir Nawaz fell for my trick and allowed me to stay.

Thus I was able to learn some important information on their activities and later on I communicated those to our Mukti Bahini. I kept at this as long as I could. But unfortunately, I could not carry on this act for too long. It turned out, unbeknownst to me, that Pakistani Intelligence Bureau (IB) had been following my activities during my stay in the camp.

On October 9, they arrested me again on a new order. That night, they tortured me inhumanely and took me to the Pakshi Hardinge Bridge*, about twenty kilometers away from Pabna city. They made me lay on my back in the middle of the bridge. One of the Pak soldiers jumped upon my chest and stomped on me. I was blindfolded at the time and my hands were tied. But I still managed to kick one of the soldiers. The soldier fell on the railing of the bridge. He got up and immediately stabbed me in the shoulder with his bayonet. I was beset by pain and felt like dying from thirst. I desperately asked for water. A few minutes later a soldier said to me, “*Lo, piyo ...Here, drink this.*” When I opened my mouth, a beastly soldier stabbed me in the tongue. Blood started to drip down my cheek. I thought to myself that if this continued, I would surely die. But even then, I did not lose hope or resolve. I always believed that I could survive.

So I stayed on the ground and pretended that I was dead. I was very quiet and kept my eyes shut. I heard a Pakistani soldier saying to another in Urdu, “Leave him, he is dead now.” May be the other soldier was not convinced, so in order to make sure he poked me five or six times on my thighs and legs with his burning cigarette. Calling upon every ounce of my willpower, I bore the pain. The Pakistani soldiers then decided to throw me into the river Padma with my hands and legs bound. As soon as I heard what they were up to, I brought the toes of my feet together and kept my ankles straight and a little apart from each other to loosen the ties.

At the dead of night, with my eyes, hands, and legs tied, I was thrown almost a hundred feet down into the river Padma. At first, I went deep into the water. Then I straightened my feet and was able to slip through the binds. When my feet were free, I used them to swim downstream. I swam to Dadapur, almost four miles away from the Hardinge Bridge on Pakshi. I kept on crying “Help! Somebody save me.” The night was almost over. A small fishing boat pulled me out of the Padma at Dadapur docks. The fishermen untied my eyes and hands. I was still bleeding from my slashed tongue and the bayonet wounds on my shoulder.

At my request, the fishermen took me to the home of Wasek Ali of the Dadapur Mukti Bahini. I was there for a day. A village doctor came to examine me. He gave me some medicine, but I was not able to eat anything then. The insides of my mouth had become swollen. I was not able to swallow anything. There was pain and swelling all over my body as well. At that house, they fed me barley and milk by spoons. I was barely able to gulp down a few spoonful at a time. They massaged my body with camphor and mustard oil. After I was a little better, I returned home and went back to India again. There I was admitted to a hospital by my brother, Shaheed Abdus Sattar Lahu. All the doctors and attendants there were astonished that I was still alive.

Later in the war, I was the commander of a squad of twenty five freedom fighters. We even fought in Pabna. To my great joy, I was able to finish off a good deal of Pak soldiers, [Razakars](#) †, and Naxalites during that time.

Once a doctor in Kolkata (India) asked me how I had survived. I replied that I had lived because I did not betray my motherland.

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- *Naxalite or Naxal* A generic term used to refer to various communist guerrilla groups in India originated around 1967. The communist group followed Maoist ideology.
 - *Pakshi Hardinge Bridge* A steel railway bridge over the river Padma located at Pakshi, Pabna district, in western Bangladesh. Construction of the bridge began in 1910 and trains started crossing from 1915. The bridge is 1.8 kilometers (1.1 miles) long.

Certain Death

Shafi Ahmed

*Former Professor of English, [Bangladesh Agricultural University](#) †,
Mymensingh*

November 6, 1971, it was about 11 p.m. I heard someone knocking on the door. When I opened the door, there were six or seven young men; everyone had a rifle on his hand. They almost shoved me aside and entered, “Does Shafi Ahmed live here?”

I replied, “Yes, I am Shafi Ahmed.”

They said they wanted to search the house. Back then, my colleague and friend Dr. Kazi Mafijur Rahman was also living with me. We both asked, “But, why?” at the same time.

They said, “This is a hideout of the [Mukti Bahini](#) † and there are loads of weapons hidden here.”

With that said, they began to search the house. And what a search it was! They ransacked the whole place and turned it upside down. Then they astounded me by saying, “You have to go to the brigade headquarters right away.”

I told them that I would go in the morning. And if they had any complaint against me they should have notified the authority. One of them then said, “I am the group commander, you’ll just go with us and then come back.”

I looked at them, they were all armed. Against them it was just me, alone! So I had to go. Before I left, I said to Mr. Mafij, “Please, do something for me.”

When we came downstairs, I saw that my house was surrounded by several armed men from the [Al-Badr](#) †. A [Subedar](#) † with six or seven Pak army soldiers was there waiting on a truck in the street. The Subedar ordered me to get on the truck. Like a puppet, I did just as I was told to do. The young men of the Badr group also got on the truck with me. The truck stopped near the banyan tree beside the Project Office of the [Agricultural University](#) †. I saw the Subedar get down from the truck and with him the Al-Badr commander. They moved a bit away from the truck and discussed something between themselves. Afterwards, a Badr member told me to get down and meet the Subedar. When I went to the Subedar, he accused me of acting against Pakistan and started asking me various questions.

They alleged that I was guilty of spreading anti-Pakistan sentiments in my class and provoking my students to join the Liberation War. They also claimed that I had discouraged students from attending classes, that I was an Indian agent, and that I was indirectly involved in the movement for an independent Bangladesh. Scared for my life, I denied everything. But there is no problem in admitting now that those allegations were not entirely baseless. When I denied everything, the Subedar started to hit me on my face, my chest, my back, and my head. Four or five soldiers and four or five Badr members joined with him; they were brutally attacking me like hyenas.

They beat me, punched me, kicked me, and even hit me with the butt of their rifles. At one point, they hung me upside down from the truck. Two Pak soldiers held onto my legs on the truck with the rest of my body hanging outside and then started the truck. Subsequently, they rolled me over and pointed a rifle at my head threatening to shoot me. They demanded the names of the university students who had joined the [Mukti Bahini](#) † and the names of the teachers and the staff who harbored anti-Pakistan sentiments. When I said I know nothing about such matters, they tortured me further. Such terrible, indescribable torture! My whole body was injured by then, my head and face had swollen up. I felt unbearable pain all over my body, but the torture did not stop. After finishing the first round of torture there, they took me by the same truck to the University Club which was being used as the brigade headquarters at the time.

My fate was still uncertain. I was not sure what was going to happen next. But I was prepared for any dreadful situation. It was about 1 a.m. A lieutenant of the Pak Army entered a room in the club and woke a captain up. They discussed something in muted voices for some time. I could hear them whispering from outside. Although I could not understand anything, I guessed that the subject of their conversation was none other than me. My guess was right. Soon afterwards, I was called into the captain’s room. The captain inquired whether the allegations brought against me were true or not. Afraid of death, I denied. Then both the captain and the lieutenant showered me with obscene words. The commander of the Badr group was called in. He was a student of the Agricultural University. I do not remember his name or which year he belonged to. But I did recognize his face. When the captain asked him about me, he accused me of spreading anti-Pakistan sentiments right to my face. The captain called me, a liar, threatened me, and gave the order to finish me off. He ordered them not to waste bullets on me, told them to use bayonets.

The lieutenant along with some soldiers and Al-Badr members took me to the [Boddho-bhumi](#) † (massacre grounds) near the university guest house on the bank of the river. They took my shirt and vest off and tied up my hands and feet. I was wearing only my pants. I was told to prepare for death. An Al-Badr member was ordered to thrust his bayonet into me. He came towards me with the bayonet in hand and told me that he had already killed eight people with bayonet in that same killing field. I would be his number nine. They were taunting me. All those words were sneers against the Bangali nationalism. I had to tolerate all these without uttering a word. The lieutenant told me that the time was 2:25 a.m. and at exactly 2:30 I would be finished. I was facing certain death. I was going to be dead within the next five minutes. I remembered my friends and

families, particularly my wife and my only son who was four-months old. In the meantime, a Pak soldier lit a cigarette and pressed it against my back. I cried out in pain. They taunted and laughed at me in a hysteric frenzy.

With death knocking at my door, I begged the lieutenant to spare my life just for the night. By God's will, the lieutenant granted my appeal! Somehow I was thinking, that people would know about me by tomorrow and they would try to get me free ... I might just get saved. I was back on the truck again. I looked up, there were thousands of stars in the sky and my well-known campus was silent underneath. I felt terribly sad. Everyone was so close to me but they could do nothing.

From there, I was taken to Suhrawardy Hall in the campus, which was serving as another [cantonment](#) †. The lieutenant accompanied me. There, I was introduced as an active member of the Mukti Bahini to all the Pakistani soldiers. That started another round of incessant beating and the torture continued late into the night. I was kept in a storeroom near the kitchen under the supervision of a Pakistani soldier. The lieutenant left with his squad after that. The soldier tormented and tortured me the rest of the night using different kinds of methods. I think he was ordered to do so.

At last the night was over. The room I was in had no window, so I could not see daylight. The soldier locked me up and left some time in the morning. There were no arrangements for sleeping or sitting in that room. I was sitting on the floor all the time I was in there. Around 10 o'clock in the morning, some Pakistani soldiers came in and started torturing me again. Several of them were punching me on my chest and back at the same time and asked all sorts of questions. I had no answers to give. But I was not allowed to be silent. They would hit me if I did not reply and also if they did not like the answers. This went on until 2 o'clock.

Then I was taken to a room on the second floor. A little later, a soldier came and told me that the captain wanted to see me. When I came outside, I saw a Pakistani captain strolling on the veranda. He ordered me to follow him. Then he asked me why I was arrested. I replied that I did not know. He then told me to get on his Jeep and informed me that I was arrested for preaching anti-Pakistan propaganda in the classroom and that it was my own students who had reported against me. I did not reply. In fact, I had no energy left after the suffering I had been through. The captain brought me to their office in the University Club. I was still uncertain about my fate. I was waiting for my death sentence. The captain then told me to sign a bond. The conditions on the bond were as follows – 'I was involved in anti-Pakistan activism in the past and am still involved. I had been proven guilty. I was being forgiven this time. However, if I were to be found involved in these types of activities in the future, I would have to face whatever punishment given'. I had no option but to sign it in order to save my life. But I could not really sign it from the heart. I was released around 3:30 in the afternoon. After returning home, I was bedridden for almost a week. After going through a lot of treatment, I recovered a little and went to Dhaka on November 14, and from there I went back to my hometown in Sylhet on November 19. All my university colleagues came to see me after I was released. They sympathized with me. I am ever grateful to all of them.

Although I was freed on November 7 at 3:30 p.m., my peace of mind had been taken away. Every single moment, I felt the panic engulfing me. Even when I was sleeping, I often shuddered in fear. My wife often told me, "Though they did not kill you for real, they have killed you inside."

Pahartali Massacre

A. K. M. Afsar Uddin

Former Railway Officer, Pahartali, Chittagong

November 10, Wednesday. It was the 20th day of the holy month of Ramadan. It was 5:30 in the morning and I had just stepped out on the steps after saying my Fajr prayer at the Akbar Shah mosque. A non-Bengali, a [Bihari](#) † to be precise, came up to me and complained that Bangalis had killed four Biharis and left their bodies in the plains just beside the hill to the east of the mosque. In Urdu, he said, "*Colony ka halat kharab ho jayega ...* The situation will get very dangerous in the colony."

I did not know the man. He asked us to have a look at the corpses. Akbar Hossain, I, and four other Musallis (Muslim devotees) went to the other side of the hill to check out the matter. As we reached the open ground after crossing the road between two hills, we saw lots of non-Bangalis standing around the corpses with deadly weapons and a mob was approaching from the east with loud cries. My companions and I got very scared by the mob. Then I heard someone shout, "*Khatam kar...* Finish them!" Some men with guns were standing in front of the corpses—most of them were railway staff I knew.

Among the armed men, Md. Akbar Khan was particularly notable. Akbar Khan was a boiler-maker at the Pahartali loco shade. In those days, he used to work as an armed bodyguard for Mohammad Israil (Division Personnel Officer) and Golam Yusuf (Divisional Superintendent) at the Pahartali Divisional Superintendent's office and intimidate Bangalis with his gun. He would give chase to anybody who went near the office door. I saw many other familiar faces. There were Union Council Chairman Yusuf, Ifikhar Uddin of the Drawing Section from our office, Ziaul Haque, and retired Office Superintendent Hamid Hossain. They were all non-Bangalis. They were also carrying various lethal weapons. When Md. Akbar spotted us, he started shouting obscenities and said, "*Ihan se vago saala Bangali log ...* Get lost you bloody Bangalis." Then something else rang in our ears, "*Vaag ne maat dao, khatam karo ...* Don't let them escape, kill them."

We cautiously retreated a few steps at a time. Some people including a few railway contractors lived near the hillside. We warned them by shouting that the Biharis were coming. Feeling helpless and scared, I went to the Pahartali Police Station with Akbar Hossain. We found only three constables there. We told them what we saw and asked for help but they could not help us. Then we contacted the Double Mooring Police Station by phone. They could not assure us of any immediate help either.

My companion Akbar Hossain was getting nervous about his family and kids. So he left for his home from the police station. Upon reaching the street near his house, some Biharis got to him and drove him to the place where the dead bodies were. That was his last journey. Akbar Hossain was executed there—he could not reach his home nor see the faces of his wife and kids. He was not given the chance to get to his home.

I was pacing back and forth inside the police station and keeping an eye towards the (railway) colony. It was approximately half past seven in the morning. People were coming up, running. They said that the Biharis were going to every house in groups and taking away Bangalis.

They informed that the Biharis said, "*Chaliye Chairman saab aya, sabko bulaya, statement dena hoga...* Let's go. The Chairman has

come, he called everybody. You have to give a statement.”

To some they said, “*S.P. aya, statement dena hoga* ... The Superintendent of Police (S.P.) is here, you have to give a statement.”

Or, “*Military officer aya. Ap logo ko bulaya* ... Military officer has come. He has called you all.”

They were not giving people any time to think. If someone refused to go with them, several of them took him by force. Mostly they were able to fool a lot of Bangalis who believed their words and went with them to the execution field. Some of the Biharis engaged in looting. The guards of the Ispahani Mill and the security police called the para-military force were also involved in the looting. The [Razakars](#) † and members of [EPCAF](#) † also extorted money from people by threatening them with guns.

I got information at the police station that eleven people had been captured. The situation was getting worse and I was not getting any help from the police station. So I went to Harun-UrRashid's house who was the Chairman of the [Peace Committee](#) †. People who fled from the Punjabi Line (area) were gathering on the sides of the [Grand Trunk Road](#) † and the market. There was no place to go, no help to come. Mr. Harun-Ur-Rashid immediately took me to the Double Mooring Police Station in his car. The man in charge there told us that the Officer in Charge (O.C.) had gone towards the Punjabi Line. We went back to the Pahartali Police Station. It was nine o'clock in the morning then. I met the O.C. there. I told him briefly about the Bihari activities and asked for his help.

At this time, a baby-taxi (auto-rickshaw) and a private car stopped right in front of the police station and three men got off. They were all Urdu-speaking. They introduced themselves as members of the Peace Committee and started talking with the O.C. From their conversation, it appeared that they were not willing to give the incident much importance. I requested the O.C. to visit the colony, but those three Biharis said, “*Sab jhoot hai, colony mein kuch nahi hua* ... All these are lies, nothing's happening in the colony.” Feeling helpless, I headed for the Double Mooring Police Station again. There, I met a Superintendent of Police (S.P.) from West Pakistan. I told him what had happened and asked for his help. The S.P. ordered the city Deputy Superintendent of Police (D.S.P.), Mr. Bashir, to visit the area with police force. But he also said that, “*Ye mamuli cheej hai* ... It's nothing serious.”

At about half past ten in the morning, D.S.P. Bashir arrived at the Pahartali Police Station with some policemen and Razakars. I was also with them. Police went to bring the four dead bodies which had been left in the east side of hill behind the Akbar Shah mosque by the Biharis. After quite a while, the four dead bodies were finally brought in to the police station. The faces were distorted by then. No Bihari came forward to identify them as their relatives or acquaintances.

While waiting at the police station, I got news that many people were taken from the houses of the colony and the streets. All of this—the siege, the lootings, and the killings in the execution ground continued from six o'clock in the morning till two o'clock in the afternoon. Neither the police, nor the military came forward to help those poor men.

The Imam (cleric) of the Akbar Shah mosque, Mowlana Amir Hossain was dragged into the road twice from the mosque to be taken to the execution ground. He was spared when they saw another group of people on the road. The Imam Mr. Hafez who used to lead the ‘Khatam Tarawih’*, saved his life by hiding in the small kitchen under the Akbar Shah mausoleum. NonBengalis looked several times inside the mausoleum to see if any Bangali was hiding there. The poor seventy year old Muazzin* and another sixty five year old man practicing Ramadan's ‘I'tikaf’* were reciting the Quran in fear, when about ten people from the angry mob entered the mosque, dragged them out on to the street, and handed them to the executioners. I went to the Double Mooring Police Station again at one o'clock in the afternoon. I told the officer that many people were missing from the Railway colony Punjabi Line, the Biharis had taken them, and they were dead. I requested him to try to inquire into the matter, but did not get any response. Unsuccessful in my attempts, I returned to Pahartali. The very air around Pahartali was heavy with the tears and wails of my friends and their relatives. I would have considered myself lucky if these things would have ended at the point I have described so far. But what I heard from Abdul Gofran, the eye-witness of the Foy's Lake Massacre chilled my blood. When I went to Foy's Lake at six o'clock in the evening with some other people, it was clear to me that Gofran was not lying. (*Refer to the next article - “Massacre at Foy's lake” by Abdul Gofran - Editor*).

I saw countless dismembered dead bodies lying scattered in both above and below the high grounds around the lake. A number of decapitated heads were gathered in a place. In another place, some dead bodies were dumped upside down in a hole with legs sticking outside. These ghastly scenes almost made us faint. Barely managing to hold ourselves together, we left that execution ground by following a trail through the west side jungle.

The next day (November 11) at half past four in the afternoon, I met a man in the market who was returning from the hills after finishing his work in the farm up there. From him, I came to know that many dead bodies were lying on the hill opposite of Foy's Lake. Three others and I walked a trail through the hill to see what had happened. When we reached there at six o'clock in the evening, the scenes waiting for us there could only be described as a nightmare. I do not know if there is any massacre in the history of civilization which can parallel the hell we observed. It could easily defeat the stories from the barbaric ages. What did I see? I saw an endless number of dead bodies. My eyes were fixed. I pulled myself together and took a good look. From what I saw, most of the dead bodies there were of women. They were naked. Most were young women who had been dead for at least two or three days. When I looked more carefully, I realized that most of these dead women had fetuses decomposing in their womb. There were ten to fifteen dead bodies piled in each stack. There were a lot of these stacks in different places on the hill.

One of my companions fainted. Barely managing to keep my own senses, I counted the dead bodies one by one—there were a total of one thousand and eighty two poor dead young women! From what I understood watching those half decomposed dead bodies, most of them were killed by the slash of a knife horizontally across their belly.

We left the place quietly by the trail through the hill. Later, I came to know that most of those young women were snatched away from various places and held captive at the Chittagong [Cantonment](#) † to satisfy the sexual hunger of the Pakistani soldiers. Most of them looked educated and were perhaps from honorable families. When they got pregnant and sexually less desirable, they were murdered and dumped in that isolated place. With the help of the Non-Bengali inhabitants of the Wireless Colony and the Firoz Shah Colony, the Pakistani Army dumped them in this hill so that nobody would know.

□ *I'tikaf* Ritual performed by pious Muslims during the last days of Ramadan, while they reside at a mosque for those days devoted only

to praying.

- *Khatam Tarawih* A special evening prayer during the month of Ramadan.
- *Muazzin* The person assigned to recite [Azaan](#) †, or call for prayers at a mosque.

Massacre at Foy's Lake

Abdul Gofran

Businessman, Pahartali, Chittagong

Mwas just a simple shopkeeper. My shop was adjacent to the Akbar Shah Mosque in Pahartali. On November 10, 1971, some [Biharis](#) † abducted me from that shop. I realized that they were going to kill me. Probably it was not my time to die and I survived, but the horrible killings I witnessed still give me the chills.

On the day of the incident, at six in the morning, about fifty non-Bengali forcefully grabbed me from my shop and took me towards the east through the Foy's Lake Road. When we were crossing the gate to the lake, I noticed that hundreds of Biharis had gathered around the Pump House and on the Wireless Colony Road. They were cheering. A lot of Bangalis had been brought in with their hands and legs tied up and were gathered near the basin of water by the high ground to the north of the Pump House.

Several Biharis were standing there with unsheathed swords and daggers. Some of the Biharis would punch and kick groups of five or six of the Bangalis before pushing them in front of those executioners and the executioners beheaded those Bangalis with their swords with sheer pleasure. Several groups were executed like this. I prepared myself for certain death.

I was wearing an expensive woolen jumper. A non-Bengali young man took a fancy to it, came across, and took it off of me. Then one man came and grabbed my hands tightly with another man coming towards me with his fists ready to punch. Without thinking any further, I punched him instead and dived into the lake. I swam underwater straight across the lake. The allies of the executioners threw rocks and stones at me relentlessly but luckily none managed to hit me. At first nobody came after me, but later some dived into the water. Seeing them pursue me, I hid myself in the brambles and bushes on the other bank and lied as still as a dead body so that they couldn't locate my position from my movements. Those animals searched around but failed to find me and returned to the other side. When I was certain that they had all left, I peeked out and witnessed the massacre of Bangalis on the other side. I saw that the Bangalis, in groups of five or six, were lined up on the high ground, beaten severely, and then pushed forward to the executioners one after another. The executioners killed them by stabbing them in the belly and cutting their heads off. After killing them, their dead bodies were kicked down the hill. Some corpses were dragged towards the hill on the east side.

These killings went on till nearly two o'clock in the afternoon. Sometime after two o'clock, ten or twelve men were brought. From what I gathered, they were being ordered to dig up the ground to bury the dead bodies. They were clasping their hands and probably begging for their lives to be spared. It seemed like that the executioners reassured them of their safety. Then those Bangalis began to dig. After a while, the dead bodies were buried in the newly dug up ditch. Now it was time for the gravediggers to die. I could see the Bangalis dropping to the executioners' feet and begging for their lives, but all those cries for mercy stirred no compassion in the hearts of the double crossers. They were murdered just like the Bangalis before them. When none of the Bangalis there were left alive, the executioners left the place cheering with joy. Still, a lot of the corpses were scattered around the place. Undoubtedly, those became the food for dogs, jackals, and vultures.

I was still shocked by the scenes I had witnessed. So many people, several of whom were known to me, just died in front of my eyes and I became the lone witness to this horrific incident. Many Biharis and army men passed through that road after the massacre; nobody even looked at the place for a moment and those who looked didn't shed a single drop of tear. Rather, those who noticed looked glad, pleased—especially, the officers of Pakistan Army.

After a long time, I was sure that no more Biharis or army men were using that road. I then crossed to the other side of the lake very cautiously, climbed up the hill on the west side, and finally got back to my shop by sticking close to the mountainside. I spent that whole evening and the night at the shop. Later, I fled from the place.

The Massacre at Peer Bari*

Md. Tabibur Rahman and Abdul Hannan

Residents of Peer Bari

Rahimuddin Fakir

Rice Trader, Bogra

Before getting into the description of the massacre, it is worthwhile to give a short introduction of the Peer family and the reason behind the murders. The village Ramshahar is situated about seven miles north of Bogra city. It is close to the historic Mahasthangarh near the Gokul intersection*. In this village lived Peer-e-Kamel Dr. Kaharullah, the elder of the famous Peer (Islamic spiritual leader) family of North Bengal. He was a Sufi leader of the Mojaddedia philosophy. It should be noted that, during the days before the separation, the principal of Govt. Azizul Haque College, Bogra, the knowledgeable Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah* was an ardent follower of Dr. Kaharullah. The Peer left thousands of followers in North Bengal, Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Tangail, and also in many places of West Bengal, India. Even today, countless followers from distant places turn up at his Dargah (shrine) for pilgrimage during the Bangla months of Falgun and Chaitra (spring). This pilgrimage has been held at Ramshahar for more than seventy years. Dr. Kaharullah was the author of five widely circulated written books.

After his death, Dr. Kaharullah was succeeded by his eldest son Hajji Muhammad Salimuddin, who was followed by his younger brother

Moulavi Md. Belayet Hossain as the Peer. During this time, a change was happening in the political scene of the country. This particular Peer family, unlike many other religious leaders, was not blinded by religion and selfishness and did not take a negative role towards the [Mass Upsurge of 1969](#) † and the general election of 1970. Instead they played a significant role in the struggle for independence of Bangladesh and were able to influence a large number of their followers.

In order to better comprehend the murders of the Peer family, a couple of political incidents need to be mentioned. These will shed some light on the matter. During the election in 1970, Bogra city P.D.B. candidate Osman Gani tried to use the image of Peer Moulavi Belayet Hossain during his campaign. When he failed, he lusted for revenge and later acted as the main instigator of the massacre. Also, during the election of 1970, local [Jamaat](#) † members had counted on the support of the Peer family only to be thwarted in their advances. When three sons of the Peer family went to join the Liberation War, their hatred intensified and they carried out their vengeance with the blood thirst of rabid hyenas. On the day of the incident, Mowlana Abu Taher and Osman Gani were amongst the local [Razakars](#) † and Jamaat leaders who had come disguised in [burqas](#) †.

On November 13, 1971, the barbarous Pakistan Army and their allies, the Razakars, surrounded the Peer Bari* premises and its surroundings early in the morning. Seven male members of the house, along with four others apprehended from other parts of the villages and nearby areas were lined up by the side of the pond and shot to death. Such brutality rivaled the atrocities of the Nazis in the Second World War. The eleven martyrs that day included a fourteen year old who went to grade seven and a sixty eight year old man who was sick (he had taken medicine that very day). It is worth mentioning that they were all taken into custody during Sehri* on the 23rd of Ramadan. Some had just finished eating Sehri, while others were only half way through. Not only that, Peer Md. Belayet Hossain had asked for the opportunity to say his Fajr prayers, but the so called ‘pure and real Muslims and the protectors of Islam’ did not give him that chance either.

1.

My name is Md. Tabibur Rahman. I am the fifth child of Peer Dr. Kaharullah. I had just finished my Sehri. My elder brother Habibur Rahman was about to start eating his milk-rice mix for Sehri when my eldest sister-in-law (wife to Mr. Salimuddin) came rushing into the room informing us that the military had come to our home. They had already caught Dhalu (Khalilur Rahman, her eldest son). She implored us to leave at once. I figured staying home would not be safe at all and I decided to flee by climbing over the fence. I quickly climbed up the ladder, hanging on to the banana tree by the fence for support and leapt into the Jhau (Oak) forest. As soon as I did so, two Pak military men shot two bullets from either side. One of them cried out “Halt, come here!” As I started to run for my life, another shot was fired. But they missed, possibly because here was dense fog that morning. As the third bullet missed me, I started to run as fast as I could. But soon I was exhausted and could barely move. A while later, I crashed into the fence of a pepper field and fell into a narrow dried up ditch. I moaned in agony. I do not remember how long I lay there. When I started to move again, a fourth bullet was shot at me from some distance. I was half dead by that time; my throat was dry from thirst. However, may be I was destined to live that day, some invisible force kept me alive. Crawling and walking through the small bushes and forests, I was able to escape the cordon of the Pak Army and got away to safety. Just as I drank a pitcher of water in the neighboring village and felt rejuvenated, I heard the terrible sound of continuous gunfire. I realized that Ramshahar had just turned into Karbala*. I would rather not remember this terrible ordeal. As soon as I do, I see the desolate faces of my brothers. I pray to Allah that they find peace and heaven in their after-lives.

2.

I am Abdul Hannan, brother-in-law of Habibur Rahman. I was brought up in Peer Bari from an early age. Back then I was fourteen years old and went to the seventh grade. That day I too heard about the attack of the Pakistani military after my Sehri. After Tabibur [bhai](#) † had escaped and three shots were heard, people in the house were scrambling to escape. Everyone gathered at the outer entrance of the house, but no one dared to open the door. Right then they opened fire on the crowd at the entrance. The bullet crushed a leg of Golapi, an eight year old who lived in the house. Blood drenched the place in minutes. My sister and her husband barely managed to drag her to safety and tie up the leg with a towel. Golapi was writhing in pain. Everyone was stunned by her injury. My brother-in-law, Habibur Rahman, became frantic with the fear of death. My sister and I tried our best to save him, we helped him get on top of the fence, but he was unable to jump on to the other side. He then got on to the roof but decided to come down. He even tried to wear a saree and hide amongst the women. But his beard gave him away. Eventually, he decided to surrender. He took the saree off, then said Tawba prayers after Fajr along with everyone else in the house. By that time, almost everyone in the house had been rounded up and was made to stand in the veranda of the other room with their hands tied behind their backs. A soldier came and took my brother-in-law and tied him up like the rest. I spoke to a Razakar by the name of Abu Sayeed, who was a classmate of mine from the neighboring village of Dhawakola (Abu Sayeed is now a peon at the Janata Bank. Refers to the time of the original book – Editor). A Pakistani brute, with his gun to my chest, asked me, “Jinnah, Manna kaha hai. . . Where is Jinnah and Manna?” I told him I did not know anyone by those names. Then the Razakar Abu Sayeed told the soldier, “He lives with his sister.” Upon hearing that, they let me go.

After a while, I saw that everyone was being taken outside from the veranda. I was about to go out following them when my brother-in-law pulled me aside and told me to go inside and say goodbye to my sister. When one of the soldiers saw him talking to me, he came up threateningly. My brother-in-law told him that he was instructing me to let the cows out. I ran into the house, took out the keys, and pretended to let a cow out of the barn while I kept watching. They made everyone sit faced towards the east by the pond. Then they first shot Mejo bhai (Dabiruddin, the sixty eight year old second son of the house who was ill and had just started his treatment) on the back. The cow got scared and ran away at the sound of that gunfire. I couldn’t stand there any longer either. I started to run after the cow as well. Then I heard the brush fire of the automatics. After running a fair bit of distance, I heard a man named Mozam Pagla crying and telling me not to run away, but to come back. “Come and see – everything’s finished,” he wailed. When I returned, I saw the eleven scattered dead bodies. The skulls of some were shattered, their brains had spilled out. The chests of some were crushed by bullets, some faces were extremely disfigured, and some had lost chunks of flesh from their throats and cheeks. Whenever I remember that horrifying scene, I tremble with terror and from the very bottom of my heart, I curse those fiends and their collaborators.

3.

(Rahimuddin used to be a trader of rice. His age back then was about forty two. He lived in another area of the village. He is illiterate. When he heard the gunfire first, he came outside and witnessed the event while hiding from sight. From his testimony this is what took place):

I came out after I heard the gunshot. A dense fog cover limited my visibility. As I slowly walked towards the mosque, I figured out from

their movement that they must be the military. When I heard another round of gunfire, I became alert and hid in a hole in the trunk of a large mango tree. I peeked out and was able to see the whole incident from there. I saw that about ten people were being taken to the side of the pond with their hands tied. As I could not see much from that distance, I got down from the tree and hid in the betel bush by the mosque. The military made everyone sit in a line and started shooting them in the back one at a time. Once they finished, they did not wait even for a moment. As I witnessed this scene, my limbs went cold. Trembling even as I walked, I was the first one to arrive at the scene. The victims were already dead. I untied their hands first. Soon, thousands had gathered to look at a scene that was reminiscent of the tragedy at Karbala.

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- *Gokul intersection* The place is popularly known as the ‘BehulaLakhindar Bashorghar’, the bridal chamber of Behula and Lakhindar from folk tales. *Karbala* Karbala is a city in Iraq where the Battle of Karbala took place in 680 AD. Muslims remember the battle for the tragic execution of Imam Hussain. In Bangla, the term Karbala is used to refer to a place where something tragic has happened.
 - *Peer Bari* Bari in Bengali means a house. Peer Bari refers to the home of the Peer (Islamic spiritual leader).
 - *Sehri* Sehri is a meal that Muslims eat before dawn to prepare for fasting from dawn to dusk during the holy month of Ramadan.
 - *Shahidullah, Muhammad* Dr. Muhammad Shahidullah was a famous Bangali educationist, writer, and philologist. He was the first to establish the reasons why Bangla, instead of Urdu, should be the state language of Pakistan and thus played an important role in the Language Movement.

They Were Our Mothers and Sisters

Md. Akhtaruzzaman Mondol

Officer, Muktijoddha Welfare Trust, Dhaka

Bhurungamari war front. On the night of November 11, 1971, we started a joint assault on the merciless Pakistani occupying forces from three sides – the west, the north, and the east of Bhurungamari. At 8 a.m., November 11, the Indian Air Force jets carried out raids on the Pakistani forces stationed at Pateshwari Rail Station. The raid destroyed a number of buildings in the area, including the two storied one west of the rail station. The air raids along with the joint attack by the [Allied Forces](#) † caused havoc among the Pakistani Army. They lost a lot of soldiers and were forced to abandon their post at Pateshwari. The freedom fighters took control of Pateshwari and continued their attack on the enemy near the east of Bhurungamari.

On November 13, we started a massive offensive from the aforementioned position. Indian Allied Forces used canon, mortars, HMG, RR, and other heavy weaponry to rain down hell fire on the enemy. They also had Air Force jets patrolling the skies, which had been going on for over a day. By evening, we had come upon the foe near Bhurungamari from three sides and had been relentless in our assaults. The enemy fire subsided around midnight and ceased completely before dawn. At daybreak on November 14, we entered Bhurungamari with the defiant cry of ‘[Joy Bangla](#)’ †. The empty Bhurungamari was like a ghost town—still, quiet, and lifeless. There was no sign of life anywhere—not even dogs, cats, or birds. The whole place spoke only of the atrocities of the Pakistani hyenas. In fear of the mines that might have been left by the Pak Army, the jubilant freedom fighters were warned against abandoning the road and roaming into the field or the jungle. About forty soldiers of the barbaric Pak Army and 60 [EPCAF](#) † members were rounded up from the Bhurungamari High School and near the C.O. (Circle Officer) office; their ammunition had run out. The Allied Forces took the beasts as prisoners and sent them to India lest we should kill them.

The captain of this demonic army, Ataullah Khan was discovered torn apart by shrapnel, along with a tortured Bangali woman in one of the destroyed bunkers by the C.O. Office. The drunk scoundrel had been clutching on to her when he was killed. She seemed to be either a student of a college or university or an educated housewife. The clear evidence of abuse was visible all over the poor woman’s body. We made arrangements for the proper burial of this brave martyred sister of ours and advanced into the town.

Almost fifty Pak soldiers had died in this battle. We took our positions on the intersection of east Bhurungamari, to the south of the college. We shed tears of joy as we reflected on having freed our motherland. We took the sacred soil of a free Bangla to our bosoms, rubbed it on our forehead—christening ourselves with the purity of our motherland. We hoisted the flag of an independent Bangladesh in front of the C.O. Office—the golden map in the middle of the red circle, adorning the green fields around it*. As if to celebrate freedom, the flag started to flutter in the wind. A sensation like this can only be felt, never really described.

It never occurred to us then what terrible scenes we would have to see only a little while later. We never thought that this joy would be wiped out in a moment—that we would have to bear witness to such inhuman acts. We took the asphalt road to the position on the east of Bhurungamari at around 9 a.m. I was instructed over the wireless to report back to the C.O. office. We saw a few young girls through the window on the second floor of the C.O.’s (Circle Officer’s) living quarters. A few of us went upstairs and found them locked from the outside. We broke open the lock with the butt of our rifles and entered the room. As soon as we did, we had to close our eyes and stumble back outside. We lost our voices, a few moments passed in silence. There were four girls inside: two of them completely naked, the other two only in their panties. We threw four [lungis](#) † and four shataranjis (area rugs) inside. We tried to speak to the girls from outside the door, but they could not reply. Their bodies had been abused and violated; they bore innumerable marks of torture by the abominations that were the Pakistani soldiers. One of them was about seven months pregnant. We learned a bit about another. She was a student of Mymensingh College. They were taken to a hospital in India for treatment immediately in one of the Indian Army medical core vans.

Then we found the skeletons in the bushes and bamboo forests by the road. There were bangles on the bones of some of the skeletons. Some had long hair and torn saree and blouses beside them. We could smell the stench of fresh corpses from the forest and the bushes by the road. Near the intersection of our position at the east, on the west side of Joymonirhat road, two dead bodies were recovered side by side. We

buried them at the same place. Sixteen women, victims of repeated rapes and torture, were rescued from a locked room in Bhurungamari High School. They were also taken to India. They had been abducted and brought from the different villages nearby.

On the second floor of the C.O. office, in the room by the south stairs, puddles of blood were found on the floor. Torn apart sarees, blouses, petticoats, brassieres, hair were all over the place. We saw ropes and cords on the bars of the window to the east—they were clearly used to bind the hands of the victims. The fiends used to tie the hands of the girls here and rape and torture them over and over again. On the north wall of the room, we could make out two letters from the Bangla alphabet written in blood, about 7-8 inches apart, they read ‘Jo’ and ‘Ba’. Perhaps her name was ‘Joba’ (the Hibiscus flower - Editor) or maybe she tried to defy her captivity with that rebellious cry of freedom—‘Joy Bangla’.

Rotten corpses of tortured men and women were also found in the bushes that grew by the abandoned rail line and asphalt road on the west side of the Dudhkumar river bridge. It felt as if the foul odor rising from the corpses of the tortured men and women who had dreamt of freedom and were now left to rot on the roads and bushes, spoke out to us, “This stifling stench from the rotten corpses has bought you independence.”

Three Days in the Cavern of Death

Saleh Mustafa Jamil

Computer Instructor, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

During the 1960s, while still in school, I cherished the idea of freedom. In 1964, a communal riot broke out in Dhaka. From my home in Swamibagh, I saw thousands of Hindu women and children coming into Dhaka in search of a safe haven. Our neighbors, Manju’di and her family took refuge in our house. I wished never to see such contempt for human life in the name of religion. Then I found a bulletin : “Bangalis, Fight Back”. And a name was forever etched into my heart – [Sheikh Mujibur Rahman](#) †. I realized that I am a Bangali and I have to live like a Bangali. Even before that, we never flew a flag on August 14 (the Independence Day of Pakistan - Editor) at our home. My father took part in the movement against the British. He had spent time in prison for it, he even lost his hearing in one ear during an attack. He used to say that Pakistan had tricked us. This was not a country of ‘purity’ (the literal meaning of the word Pakistan would be ‘the land of purity’ - Editor), but a country of ‘trickery’. I remember, after 1969, I never wrote East Pakistan in the address of any letters; I always wrote Bangladesh.

In 1970, I was the Cultural Secretary of Dhaka College [Chhatra League](#) †. During the election of 1970, our home was the press center of [Awami League](#) †. My second eldest brother was the General Secretary of the Narinda-Gopibagh Union Awami League.

After the war started in March, I went into hiding. Till June, I was in Boxnagar, on the other side of the Buriganga river (Dhaka is situated on the bank of Buriganga river – Editor). As soon as I came back to Dhaka, I met up with my old college friend, Ashraf. They used to live behind the Rampura Television Building. It was I had little training there before joining the Liberation War. We named our camp ‘Sheikher Para’, the area of the Sheikh. There was only one ‘[Sheikh](#)’ † known all over Bangladesh. My duties were to publicize the Liberation War, maintain communication, and collect food and other stuff in Dhaka. Some of my more significant tasks included the distribution of Bangla and English pamphlets on the Liberation War in the restroom of the American Consulate and the delivery of ultimatums to the chairmen of the [Peace Committees](#) † in Old Dhaka †.

Fateh Ali* (younger brother of Shahadat Chowdhury*, the editor of ‘Bichitra’) came on November 19. We had already collected enough warm clothes, medicine, and money for him. I escorted him to his camp in Kachpur (on the other side of Narayanganj) with the supplies.

Around 1 p.m. on November 21, our home was surrounded by the Pakistani Army. There were around fifty of them. They broke our door open and searched for my third eldest brother. They ransacked our whole house. Ten or eleven of us were taken into the yard and made to stand there while one of the soldiers had an automatic aimed at us. His finger was on the trigger, waiting for a command. I saw a familiar [Razakar](#) † at a corner of the yard, under the mango tree. This man is still living proudly in Dhaka and actually is quite well established in a position of power.

I must have been blessed with a long life. My life was spared at that time. The army took away my brother for interrogation. My mother had fainted during the ordeal. We took her to my younger sister Mahfuza Khanam’s place in Purana Paltan. She was an ex-V.P. of [DUCSU](#) †. Efforts were underway from the next day to get my brother released. On November 22, around noon, I saw an army Jeep arrive at our house, with my father in it. They had come for me. It felt like my time was up. I said goodbye to my mother and got up on the Jeep. Suddenly my heart was filled with great courage. I saw a face in my mind that gave me inspiration and hope – the face of Sheikh Mujib. I never knew that the mere memory of a face could give someone such strength. But after all, Mujib’s face was the face of Bengal.

I was taken to a three storied house inside the Tejgaon Drum Factory. Major Saliq’s office was on the first floor. On the second floor was the torture chamber. The prisoners were kept on the third floor. I was taken into the kitchen. There were five others with me – my brother, Kalu from the tea stall in our area, a garments trader from New Market, a Chakma* man, and a young freedom fighter.

They called me up for interrogation in the afternoon. There was not much to hide – they knew everything about my activities. They took me to Rampura in the evening with 5-6 trucks full of soldiers. Members of my group, including Ashraf, were hanging out at the salon near the intersection of the road to Ashraf’s house. As soon as they saw me with the soldiers, they understood what was going on and quickly left the area. The soldiers carried on to Ashraf’s house and started looking for firearms. Some weapons had been brought the week before for an operation in Dhaka. But those had already been moved to another place a couple of days ago. They found nothing, not even Ashraf or any of the others. There were only three ladies in the house. They took me to the mosque nearby to look for Ashraf’s father. It was the month of Ramadan, people were saying their Tarawih prayers. They told me to identify Ashraf’s father. I looked around the mosque and my eyes met his. But I told them that I could not find him; he must have been not there. They left empty handed.

Upon returning, they told me to write down everything I knew. And I did, but only what they already knew. They took me back to the Major that night. I was ordered to tell him everything. When I told them I did not know anything else, I was sent to the second floor. The cries of anguish that I had heard before from the first and third floors suddenly became all too real for me. I was tortured in an innovative way. My feet were put on the bars of the window and I was made to stand upside down, forced to balance myself on my hands. And then they whipped my

back and waist with a thick leather belt. I was also hit with iron rods and wood planks. After several blows, I lost my senses. Those who administered this torture were terrifying to look at; they were 7 feet tall and very dark in complexion. At night, they would put on extremely bright lights during the torture sessions. Thus, the torture went on all through day and night.

I do not have much more to say. They took me to Rampura again on November 23. Nothing new was to be found. Ashraf and his family had already left their home. The interrogation and the same torture ordeal carried on for three days. On November 27, after a great effort on their part, my father and eldest brother were able to get me and my brother released. From that cavern of death, only three of us finally escaped. I still suffer from the agony of that ordeal. The pain in my waist is there for good now. It is something that I'll have to live with for the rest of my life.

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- Chakma An indigenous tribe in Bangladesh.
 - Chowdhury, Fateh Ali Fateh Ali Chowdhury was a member of the [Crack Platoon](#) † of [Sector](#) † 2 of the [Mukti Bahini](#) †. He was a cultural activist and a student of the [University of Dhaka](#) † at the time of the Liberation War in 1971. He was the younger brother of Shahadat Chowdhury*. Freedom fighters Habibul Alam, 'Bir Pratik' and Fateh Ali Chowdhury initiated the plan of the first Bangladesh Television broadcast on the evening of December 17, 1971 after a radio broadcast on the same morning. Major ATM Haider, 'Bir Uttam', the then commanding officer of Sector 2, made a statement on Bangladesh's victory.
 - Chowdhury, Shahadat Shahadat Chowdhury was an eminent journalist and freedom fighter. He joined the weekly 'Bichitra', one of the most influential and popular Bangla magazines in Bangladesh, in 1972. He worked as an assistant editor, acting editor and editor until 1997 when the magazine stopped publishing. He was a freedom fighter and guerilla coordinator under the Sector 2 of the [Mukti Bahini](#) †.

Destination: Mirpur Killing Fields

Nazrul Bari

Businessman, Dhaka

An incident near the end of the Liberation War haunts me even today—it paralyzes me. I do not recall the exact date but it was during the third week of November, 1971. We used to live in the first house on [Road No. 32, Dhanmondi](#) †, Dhaka. It was some time after four in the afternoon.

I had gone to the Azimpur Colony to take care of some business.

Two of my friends used to live there—Naser Chowdhury was a student of the Engineering University back then and Santu was a famous goalkeeper in those days playing for the Mohammedan Football Club*. We had a lengthy discussion on various topics, such as the ongoing Liberation War, the independence of our country, the activities of the freedom fighters, the atrocities of the Pak Army and [Razakars](#) †, etc. Both of my friends were directly involved in the Liberation War. Naser advised me to be more careful the next few days as some big operations were about to commence soon. We were cut short in our discussion as someone came in and informed us that a curfew had been declared from 6 p.m. I decided to start for home immediately. I had to reach home by any means possible before the curfew. Santu kept urging me to stay the night, "I'll call your home and inform them," he said.

But I ignored all their requests and left in a hurry. When I walked out of the Azimpur Colony onto the main road it was 5:30 p.m. already. There were very few rickshaws on the street. The two or three that were available, were rushing towards their own destinations. No one was willing to go to the Dhanmondi area. I did not consider it safe to stand there. I started walking quickly towards the [New Market](#) †. It was more like running than walking. When I reached the fresh produce bazaar section of the New Market area, I was sweating like a pig. But to my dismay, neither a rickshaw nor a bus was available there either. The time was nearly quarter to six by then.

There was a group of Pak militia and [Razakars](#) † standing nearby the bazaar along with a few other passersby. Staying with Santu and Naser at their place would have been the wiser decision, but it was too late to go back then. In the meantime, a couple of local buses had passed us but the Razakars and the militia would not let us get on board. Another bus stopped after a while and we got on board without much resistance from the Razakars or the Pak militia. But it was already past 6 p.m. so the bus would not move. I started breathing heavily. I noticed there were four or five Pak soldiers and several Razakars seating at the back of the bus and they were carrying rifles.

At last the bus started. There was a Jeep and a truck carrying Pak soldiers at the petrol pump near Dhanmondi road 3. The bus driver pulled over near those vehicles. The bus driver and the conductor were both non-Bengalis. A soldier got down from the Jeep and spoke to the driver. Then the Jeep and the truck left via Green Road. At that time the bus stops after the New Market stop were, consecutively* Science Laboratory, Road No. 5, Kalabagan Staff Quarters, Sukrabad, Sobhanbag, Asad Gate, and so on – up to Mirpur. All the roads were deserted, not a single person was in sight. The bus had zoomed past the Road No. 5 stop and was crossing the Kalabagan Staff Quarters stop at a high speed. It was not stopping at any of the stops. The Bangali passengers for Road No. 5 and Kalabagan stops were shouting at the driver, "Rokho... Stop!" Neither the driver nor the conductor cared. I shivered at a sudden thought, "Is something bad going to happen? What did the driver and the Pakistani Army talk about?"

I was standing near the door of the bus, on the foothold of the door, holding onto the handles. As soon as I moved, a young non-Bengali Razakar pulled me in by my arm and said, "Saale, Mirpur chaalo, Bangali log ko Chapli kabab banayenge... Bastards, let's go to Mirpur, we will make Kebab out of you Bangalis."

I immediately understood what he meant; the bus would not be stopping anywhere, and where it would, my heartbeat would stop there forever too. Neither I nor any of the other Bangali passengers were ever to return by that same route. I was facing certain death. They were taking us some place where my body would be riddled with machine-gun bullets, then it would be either burned or buried somewhere. No one including my parents would ever know where the murderers had taken their dear son Joglu, or how mercilessly they had killed him. All these thoughts crossed my mind in a flash. Right then the bus was crossing Dhanmondi 32 where I lived. I suddenly noticed my parents and my younger siblings

standing on the second floor veranda of our house with my two aunts and the husband of my youngest aunt. They were looking at the streets and from their restless waving it seemed as if they had spotted me on the bus.

I decided in that split second; there was no point dying unarmed like a dog at the hands of these killers. With a deliberate shake, I freed my arm from the grasp of that young Razakar and jumped off the moving bus. (Some buses in Asia do not lock the doors while moving – Editor). With a flip I rolled away quite a distance. My shirt and pants were torn, flesh was exposed from the gush on the right side of the body and I was bleeding heavily. There were large pipes of Titas Gas Company* laying by the road, I jumped over those and managed to reach the house next to ours. The servant of that house helped me to my house afterwards.

I later learned that none of the Bangalis on that bus escaped alive. The enemies lined up everyone from the bus under the Mirpur Bridge and brush-fired them.

□ Mohammedan Sporting Club Mohammedan Sporting Club is one of the two most prominent sporting clubs in Bangladesh. It was established in the 1930s as Dhaka Mohammedan. It has since, especially after the Liberation War, started many local branches around the country. Along with Abahani Limited, its lifelong rivals, it has dominated the Bangladesh local sports scene for over four decades.

□ The Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company The company was formed in 1964 as a joint stock company of the then central Government of Pakistan and Pakistan Shell Oil, with a view to transmitting and distributing natural gas to the Dhaka city from the discovered natural gas field called 'Titas' located on the bank of the river Titas. At present, it is the largest natural gas distributor in Bangladesh.

Lost Four Comrades

Yafes Osman

Architect, Dhaka

It was November 11, 1971. This event took place at 10.30 p.m., on the highway near the Jagannath Dighi (a water body) in Comilla district.

The night was pitch black. Two of our guerrilla units were marching towards the destination of Satbaria inside Bangladesh, leaving behind the border of Bhairab Tila, India. We were advancing by the aail (ridges) of the paddy fields carrying ammunition on our back and clutching onto our weapons. The ridges were very narrow. Here and there were patches of water, sometimes knee deep. It was very difficult for us to advance with all our equipment. After about half a mile, we came across a burnt down, deserted village. There was an eerie silence. It was as if the night had just got even darker. The surrounding trees made it difficult to see someone just ten feet in front of our eyes. We crossed the village and came upon fields full of paddy again. Having stepped on our motherland, Bangladesh, our courage got boosted by a thousand times.

We moved closer toward the highway. Having ordered two teams to take position a bit farther away, I was trying to arrange two smaller units to cover both sides of the road. However it was impossible to find a convenient location in the paddy fields and muddy waters. Our guide and I advanced towards the main highway, but couldn't see anything. As far as we were concerned, the Pakistani Army had left this area the day before. Regardless, we were all anxious to free our motherland from the occupying forces. The two of us retreated and the first unit began moving forward carefully with the guide leading them.

Suddenly from the other side of the street came a firm command, "Hands Up!" Our guide halted immediately. Azad, the group commander, was the first to assess the situation. His Sten gun roared; some of us fired our rifles too. However, by then the Pak Army had surrounded us from three sides. We dropped low and took position; some of us lay on the ground while others submerged into the patches of water in the paddy fields. We fired a few rounds. But the enemies outnumbered us; they continued to fire relentlessly.

I heard sounds of vehicles approaching; the enemy's reinforcements had arrived. It was getting really difficult to fight with the equipment on our backs. I shouted and ordered everyone to retreat through a gap on our left. May be not all of them heard my command because I saw a few advance instead. Dudu Mia, a fellow comrade, got shot. He shouted, '[Joy Bangla](#)' †; stood up and roared again, 'Joy Bangla'. And then I heard him fall. By this time, enemy artillery shells were exploding all around us. We crawled on our chests towards the gap on the left. Amidst the constant explosion of shells, we were able to escape. After

running with our heads lowered for about 300 yards, we reached safety. The place we had just left was then being bombarded heavily with artillery shells. I swapped my Sten gun for a rifle and started to run back to bring my comrades who had not heard my command; but the others held me back. I heard someone say, "No, you cannot go. Who will lead us then?" I saw the world spinning in front of my eyes. I felt as if somebody was calling my name; I heard them calling my name over the loud noise of the canons. When I opened my eyes, I found myself surrounded by heavy faces. My head was spinning but I stood up. I ordered the troops to retreat to safer grounds. A few of us remained hoping that the missing ones would return. It was not that safe a place to wait since the enemy could attack any moment. Early next morning, we received news that five of our guerrillas had died and four had been captured, while a few of the enemies were killed.

We sent our injured to the hospital. Then taking our weapons into our hands, we took an oath for retribution. No more guerrilla warfare; we decided to confront the enemy like a regular army. I remember our comrades who sacrificed their lives to save the whole unit, the martyrs Dudu, Awlad, Azad, and Bashir with utmost respect.

December 4, 1971. We started for our next destination from Kazir Haat a day early. It was around 10 p.m. We were progressing along the edge of a canal with heavy loads on our backs. There was a heavy fog that night and the dew made the road very slippery. We almost slipped on a few occasions. The gravel road hurt our bare feet. At places, we had to cross the risky monkey bridges made of single bamboo like seasoned acrobats. One fall and the noise would alert the enemy. After advancing

five miles, we came across a marsh which spread out for two miles. We saw a Mirage fighter plane flying towards the south.

We heard sounds of heavy artillery nearby and heavy bombing somewhere in the south. We started advancing again. Some of us were exhausted and could not keep up. We finally passed the marshland. A briefing on the mission took place while we rested a bit. We could see the rail tracks nearby. Following the briefing, we hid behind the bushes beside the road. Sabur, Selim, Aziz, and Harun moved forward and took up positions to cover the area that we were about to pass through. I gave my comrades the 'Go' signal and we advanced forward crossing the rail tracks, leaving behind a bunker on our right.

Within half a mile, we reached our next line of danger. We took shelter in a nearby mosque pretending to be travelers. Briefing on the mission was carried out in the tone of uttering Kalama (religious verse) so as not to raise any suspicion. After half an hour, we started again. About twenty five minutes later, we reached a footbridge. Across it was the highway. A few of the comrades took position on both sides of the highway to watch for enemy movements. Then I led the team forward and crossed the bridge safely. We felt somewhat safe as the path ahead seemed easier. However there was a constant fear of the [Razakars](#) † and the Pak Army who were already inside the village. We had to wade through knee deep mud and water for another three miles. It was shivering cold and some of us were feverish. An hour before sunrise, we finally reached Sonapur and everybody collapsed on the ground. That's when a local political colleague brought the news that a couple of miles away, in a hospital near Bojra Street, about a hundred enemy soldiers had set up their camp. Not surprisingly, the nearby villages were also occupied by Razakars. All of us stood up and I started briefing my men about the mission ahead. Some local freedom fighters also joined our team making it a total of about fifty. The target was situated very close to the government highway and was bounded by trees and paddy fields on two sides.

We divided into three groups and surrounded the area. At the first light of dawn, we started firing. When the enemy tried to take shelter near the bushes, the other two units commenced their attacks. The enemy was at a disadvantage and fired back at us from the building sporadically. Suddenly our unit near the open fields were attacked by [the Razakars](#) † from the villages in the south. Recruiting a few men from each unit, I formed another group. We surrounded the village and began a counterattack. Some of the Razakars were killed and the rest took shelter in the paddy fields. As our unit from the open fields attacked them from behind, they raised their hands and surrendered. According to the verdict of the Gara Adalat*, these were later sentenced to death. The firing continued through the whole day. By evening, many of the enemy soldiers were killed in the battlefield and the rest were executed after capture. A total number of sixty five enemy soldiers were killed. Two of our local friends were martyred. The roar of victory from the people rang through the air. By then we were all extremely exhausted and started back for the camp. Our eyes felt heavier than the loads on our backs.

□ *Gana Adalat* People's Tribunal. Refer to [Jahanara Imam](#) † in glossary.

A Hellish Nightmare

Shafiul Alam

Lawyer, Politician, Chittagong

It was November 27, 1971. Curfew had already been in place since evening. I was listening to the radio with the landlord of the house I had taken refuge in. They were broadcasting government directives, "Do not take the law into your own hands, do not arrest anyone without a warrant; submit apprehended miscreants at the police station." As I heard it, I thought to myself how bogus it all was. Suddenly, we heard someone at the door. As soon as the landlord opened the door, a group of people rushed in. All of them had weapons in their hands and their faces were covered in black. They announced themselves, "We are members of the [Badr](#) † force. Nobody make a move." They ordered us to line up and tell our names. As I said my name, the masked leader said to me, "We are arresting you." I referred to the government directive that I had recently heard and asked him for a warrant.

He replied, "We don't need those." To tell the truth they didn't indeed; not that day, nor today. They are still, at war with their defeated weapons, at war against the Bangalis and Bangladesh.

The leader ordered someone to bind my eyes and tie a rope around my waist. Suddenly, my landlord put himself between me and that person, "No, I won't let you take him from my house. I know the Badr forces kill people. You can investigate, but you cannot take him. I can assure you that he is not a criminal." The leader was furious with my landlord and he ordered him to be arrested as well. Two of the men bound him he ordered his waist immediately. I protested loudly, "You came here for me. I am going with you, am I not? Let him go, otherwise I won't take a step further."

They dismissed my protests and pushed both of us out onto the street. When a few of their people outside learned of our full identities, they let my host go. This thin sixty plus man with a mighty heart, who always had a smile on his face, was a supporter of an undivided Pakistan till his death. But he never compromised with injustice; not even that day. Even though his beliefs were well-known, a good number of freedom fighters took refuge at his place during those days. He is not alive any more. But that dearest of men, the late Syed Moinuddin Hossein, will always be very fondly remembered by me.

As I walked on to the street with them, they bound my eyes very tightly with a black cloth. They also tied my hands behind my back. We reached our destination after walking for a few minutes. I guessed we had come to the Hotel Dalim at the end of our neighborhood. This was a torture camp for the Al-Badr. As we reached the middle of the veranda on the third floor, someone shouted, "Halt!"

All of us stopped. Then came the next order, "Sentry, darwaza kholo... Open the door." They were acting like the army. Their conversations were mostly in English and Urdu. I heard the door open suddenly. I had hardly taken a few

paces into the room when I was kicked in the back with a boot and fell down on the floor. I sensed as if a few people, both sitting and lying on the ground, shivered a little in pain. I felt warm blood in my mouth. Either my teeth were broken, or my tongue was cut. As soon as the door closed someone asked, "Who are you brother?" When I said my name, two of them embraced me affectionately. These were two Ifreedom fighters who were very dear to me, Jahangir and Sanaullah Chowdhury. They helped me sit up by resting my back against the wall. Like me, everyone's hands and eyes were bound, even the ones who had been there for fifteen days or more. Thus was the rule of this place. Everyone wanted to know how everything was outside—how the war was going, how I got caught, etc.

Suddenly, we heard the sound of boots. It seemed like there were a few of them coming to the room. As the sentry opened the door, he cried out, "The Khan is here; everyone, sit up!" "The Khan" was infamous, even on the outside. He was the leader there—a vile, brutal and powerful fellow. He first asked my name and then some tidbits about politics. It seemed that someone was writing these down. He then mocked, "Don't you say '[Joy Bangla](#)' †?"

I replied, "Everyone's saying that." And that got me a ferocious punch to my face.

After that, they shouted obscenities at me and several started to kick and punch me relentlessly. My teeth were broken and blood was coming out of my nose. Unable to bear the pain, I fell to the floor. As I fell, I cried out, "Oh! Allah."

Instantly, he hit my face and said, "Rascal! say 'Lenin' and 'Mao Zedong', not 'Allah'."

The brutality seemed to increase with every hit. They seemed to know a thousand ways to inflict pain. I do not remember anything after that. When I got my consciousness back, I was lying on the cold floor. I was running a high fever and my throat was dry from thirst. I did not have the strength to get up. I heard a crow cawing somewhere; maybe it was starting to dawn. There was a great commotion in the Badr camp from that dawn. We could hear the sound of boots from the roof, the yard, and the stairs. The older prisoners seemed to be very familiar with these sounds. I heard them mumbling to themselves, "They are bringing the dead bodies down from the roof", "That's probably Jasim's voice I hear", "I don't understand why the kid talks so much", or "Can you hear that? Must be a new lot." Both my body and mind had gone numb. Right then, the door opened. Immediately, my fellow prisoners put on the binds on their eyes and hands. I was amused by this. In order to get some little measure of relief during their imprisonment, my friends had already become quite adept at loosening the ties when the door was closed and quickly putting them back on when they heard it opening again. Sometimes a few got caught though. The sentry started with the obscenities as soon as he entered, why had the binds been loosened. He pulled some by the hair, kicked, or bumped the heads of a few into the wall. Then he kicked my feet and said, "So, you are the 'guest' from last night? Tell the truth to Mr. Khan or your fate will be the same as that rascal's." I did not understand whom he was referring to. We were ordered to go to the toilet in a line. They untied our eyes and hands for a few minutes. They gave us a large tin mug full of water. We were to share that. The same happened during our meals—one plate of watery rice, a curry of shredded papaya and radish—barely enough for two people, yet the seven of us were supposed to share just that. As for water, we had that same mug, we barely wet our throats with that. Yet we did not complain—the hungry, thirsty lot of seven would finish the once a day meal with a strange peace of mind. Such was our friendship and camaraderie.

Swapan came in the afternoon and said, "[Dada](#) †, five were finished off today. They are in the Karnaphuli by now. I don't think Jasim [bhai](#) † will be living much longer. The boy who tried to escape by jumping off the roof, had been unconscious for the last three days and finally died today."

Swapan was our link between the dark confinement and the Badr encampment. He was captured for showing a freedom fighter the secret passage by his house. The teenager then somehow gained the trust of the captors. He was given the duty of cleaning the rooms and the toilets. He had unhindered access to all the rooms. During his work, he used to inform us of the daily news and the happenings as he pretended to mumble to himself. We would figure out most of his utterings. Right above us was the torture chamber of the Badr camp. Swapan used to say that they called it the 'Habia Dojokh', the deepest of hells; he did not know what the word meant. He said this much though—entering the 'Habia' meant curtains for anyone. One day, Swapan told me, "Dada, you won't be here for long; they have written down your name with four others today in their ledger book."

I did not understand fully what that meant, neither did he. I felt very tense, I could not sleep that night. We heard terrible noises from the roof all night. There were cries of terror and anguish and the cruel laughter of the fiends. It was indeed the 'deepest of hells'!

The door opened suddenly that afternoon, and three or four people carried someone in on their shoulders. They threw him on the floor. As soon as the door closed, I freed myself of my binds and picked him up. The little sunlight that came through the ventilator shone upon his face. All of us gasped, it was Jasim—the teenage freedom fighter Jasim. From the dirty mug of water, we gave him a few drops. A few tried to feel his pulse, touched his face and nose to get some reaction. His head fell from my lap, there was no life in that little body anymore. His face glistened in that single ray of sunlight.

Anyway, who needs this poetry? I kissed his cheek with great love. Later that afternoon two of the guards came and took me to 'the deepest of hells'. When they untied my eyes, I saw two 'butchers' in black uniforms standing on a wood plank placed on top of a young man. Besides them, there were another two with some sort of long black belts in their hands. There were a few more seated on chairs nearby. The young man was being interrogated; they were trying to 'torture' a confession out of him. I could not make out if he was half dead or unconscious. The whole roof was covered. Even in that dim light, I realized that this was a well-equipped torture chamber. Torture equipment were in abundance: rods of iron, bricks, needles, wooden clubs, bayonets, etc., all used to 'interrogate' and get 'confessions' out of the prisoners.

Someone kicked the young man hard and he rolled to one side like a football. The group howled in barbaric laughter. The man in charge of me hurled a series of questions at me and warned that if I did not answer them 'correctly', my fate would be even more horrible.

Some of the questions were, "When did you arrive from your homeland in India? What did you bring? Where are the rest of the leaders of your party? What is your duty in the city? Where are all your plans, papers?"

I told them, "I have never been to India. I was in my village. I have been busy with my job in the city for the last four months." They started kicking and punching me to get a confession out of me.

I said firmly, "I have nothing more to say." They took me back to the room after a while. Before leaving, they said, "You will be sent to the 'right' place."

A couple of days later, there was a sudden commotion in the Badr camp. Several prisoners were taken from their cells and put on a truck, myself included. They said, "This time you are going straight to heaven!"

When I got on the truck, I saw two of my old friends, [NAP](#) † leaders Nurunnabi and Saifuddin Khan. There were two others as well, reporter Mesbah Khan and freedom fighter Selim. After a while on an up and down track, the truck stopped on a hill. It seemed like this was an

army camp, I could hear soldiers talking in Urdu. Someone asked in an angry voice, “Why were they not thrown into the sea?”

Another said, “Ha, machli-ka khorak, machli kha lete, aur hum log machli khake mota hote... Yeah, these are fish-food, let the fish feed on them, and then we shall feast on the fish!” From their conversation, I figured we had been brought to the Circuit House Army Camp. A shiver ran down my spine. We knew enough about this place. People were being electrocuted to death every day there. We had recently collected pictures of their mass grave.

I wondered if my time was finally up. A soldier was asking our name, address, profession and history and noting them down. Our Badr escort said, “We caught him during a meeting.”

I retorted back, “Was I the only one in the meeting? Where are the others then?”

The soldier said, “Arre badri, iye to bilkul thik baat hai: tab asli baat kya hai batao... Hey Badri, that’s right! What’s the real deal then? Tell me now.”

The Badr member started to mumble. The soldier laughed out loud, “Keya baat hain bahadur Jawan... What’s wrong, brave [Jawan](#) †?” We laughed out as well.

Suddenly, there were orders to take us back. There was a sudden din and bustle all around. A lot of running and angry cursing. It seemed that the ‘heroic army’ had taken quite a beating at the hands of the [Mukti Bahini](#) † that day. We were taken to Chittagong prison, not Hotel Dalim. I had two more interrogation dates. But they were busy trying to save their own skin by then. Finally came the day we had been waiting for—the glorious Victory Day, [December 16](#) †.

But for Bangalis, has the nightmare really ended even today?

My Brother Was Killed Before My Eyes

M. Zillur Rahman

Theater Artist, Officer, [Bangla Academy](#) †, Dhaka

Just twenty feet away lay my younger brother Mizanur Rahman, Mizu, flat on his face, gunned down. I could see him from my hiding place—from the crack of a window of the Ghorashal National Jute Mill. Mizu was begging for some water. He tried to pull himself up a couple of times, but collapsed back on the ground. His body lay on the thick grass; his eyes fixed at the closed windows and doors of our quarter. Maybe his last hope was that one of us would rush out and drag him into the house. Or maybe he hoped to see us all one last time. What a devastating, heart breaking moment it was. Whenever I remember this event, the memory fills me with guilt. What was the worst that could have happened if I had run out there and tried to help Mizu? Would I have gotten shot? What if I had survived? No, that would not have been normal under the circumstances. The whole jute mill was pervaded with military and the quarters had been completely surrounded by those

attacking wolves. They were firing indiscriminately with their rifles, Sten guns, S.L.Rs, and L.M.Gs. The firing did not stop for one second. Nearly 130 to 140 [Punjabi](#) † soldiers were firing relentlessly. Anyone coming or peeking out from the staff quarters of the mill was shot down. That day, approximately 96 people, including the officers and staff of the National Jute Mill and their relatives, fell victim to this mass killing spree.

I am the eyewitness of this heart wrenching, monstrous, merciless massacre that took place on December 1, 1971, Wednesday. But there was nothing I could do at that moment. Just a few days later, we earned our cherished freedom. But alas! None of the fallen that day, including my younger brother would taste this freedom. He was a final year student of Business Studies at the [University of Dhaka](#) †, and also a promising actor of Bangladesh Television. Mizu along with 95 others would never know what it felt to be free.

I still cannot forget that terrifying day. On that morning at 11 a.m., a team of 130 to 140 Pakistani soldiers led by a Punjabi major and a captain, attacked the National Jute Mill in Ghorashal, located on the banks of the river Shitalakhya. As electricity was out, the mill was closed that day, and almost all the officials and staff were in their housing quarters. The army brought out all the staff at gunpoint and made us line up on the bank of the Shitalakhya. All of us stood there, half-dead with fear; there was no way we could have disobeyed them. We assumed that the freedom fighters’ bombing on the two or three rail bridges between Ghorashal and Tongi Stations a couple of days ago was the reason behind this ordeal. Because of this bombing, no train had been able to come to Ghorashal from Dhaka since a couple of days prior to Eid-ul Fitr. On the other hand, trains coming from Chittagong did not get past Narsingdi during that time. As a result, the army activity had slowed down a little, while the hope of freedom rekindled among the area’s general population. The people around were murmuring that the Pak Army had left the area and started gathering in Dhaka. The rumor was not entirely false. Considering the security issues following the devastated railway transportation system, Pakistani soldiers in Ghorashal and the surrounding areas had left for Dhaka by water. Only a few soldiers had stayed behind in the bunkers. On November 31, late at night, a train was heard coming towards Ghorashal from the direction of Dhaka. The people in the area were terrified. The Pakistani soldiers had repaired the destroyed bridges between Tongi and Ghorashal and reestablished rail communication. A lot of new soldiers assembled in Ghorashal on that very night coming in by the reestablished railway. A team of them attacked the National Jute Mill the next morning.

The military Major was questioning the 200 officers, staff, and relatives assembled on the bank of the river; he was speaking in Urdu with the usual military authority, “Who amongst you destroyed the bridges? Obviously some of you are involved in the bombing of the bridges. Whoever was involved in this crime better come forward and confess. Or say the names of the people involved. All of you will die if you don’t help us catch these criminals.”

Although not everyone knew of this, but a few of us did know that the younger brother of Lalu, a Peon of the mill and the eldest son of the speedboat driver along with some workers of the mill were involved in that heroic act perpetrated by the brave team of freedom fighters. But none of them were standing in that line. But who would say their names? Many of us were worried that someone might rat out their names. What would happen then? Would they kill Lalu and Soleman, since they couldn’t capture the persons actually involved? Or would they take them into custody? But no, everyone was silent; no one was saying a word. If directly asked, that person only answered in Urdu, “Hum nahi janta... I don’t know.”

Eventually, they lost patience and became vicious for not getting the right answers. He yelled at the soldiers, “Stand up! Take position. Hurry up.” Instantly, they lined up in front of us with rifles and machine guns aimed at us. We only had a few moments left. I was saying the grace

of Allah and waiting for death. Just when the last hope of survival was lost, my younger brother Mizu stepped out of the line and stood in front of the Major. He asked very bravely but politely if the Major would listen to him for just a minute. We thought Mizu might reveal some names to save his life. But no, he didn't do that; instead in a mix of broken Urdu, Bangla, and English, he tried to convince the Major that there were no miscreants or members of the [Mukti Bahini](#) † among us. That it was an impossible proposition because the security officer of the mill, Zunayed Abbasi, is a retired army person and he is a non-Bengali. Though he was not in the mill that day (he was visiting the head office at Dhaka), a conversation with him would surely dispel the Major's suspicions. Besides, he also introduced himself as a television artist, whom the officer was sure to recognize if he had been a TV viewer. "I vouch for all the people on the line, there is not one guilty person among them," he said, and pleaded with the Major to let them go.

After hearing him out, the Major replied in Urdu, "Ap samjha, tum Tipu Sultan ka Monsieur Lally hain... I get it now, you are 'Monsieur Lally' from the TV show Tipu Sultan." "Bohut accha... Very Good! That's why you look familiar. You are a very good artist. But why are you here?"

In between the conversations, the Major changed his mind, "Thik hain... Alright, on this artist's request I will spare you all. Go now, go home. But keep the mill running," he told us in Urdu. "Aur [Mukti](#) † ko pakar ke deo... And also capture the freedom fighters for us."

As if resurrected by the Major's order, we slowly headed back to our quarters. Mothers and sisters, wives and sons of our families started to weep as we returned. They touched us to make sure we are really alive. It was already 3 p.m., no one had eaten anything. None of the houses had cooked a meal. In the meantime, the military troop left the area. Silence fell upon the mill. Everyone was planning to leave for a safe harbor as soon as they got something to eat.

But this plan never came to reality. The same military troop returned to the mill. Soon they were dragging out all the male members from every quarter. The terror in the mill was accentuated by the screams and the cries of women and children from the quarters. At first, they pulled out all the men from the quarters of the two three-storied buildings and lined them up under the coconut trees at the bank of the Shitalakhya. Till then, they had not attacked the tin-shed quarters situated a little far there. About 4 months ago, the mill authority had allocated one of the tin-shed quarters to my younger brother Jobaidur Rahman, the then Assistant Mechanical Engineer of the mill. We were all living with him. I was not a staff of the mill. In those days of fear, our family, which included my parents, two younger sisters, my wife and two children, had taken shelter in that quarter with my younger brother who was working in the mill.

I heard the chaos and the cries coming from the senior officers' quarters near the riverbank and came out of our quarter to find that two military personnel were guarding the gate. Looking left and right, I noticed that it wasn't our quarter alone; the army were guarding each of the eight or ten quarters next to ours. By this time, they had surrounded the whole mill area. There was no way to escape. Unable to get out of the quarter, I peeked out of the window and noticed Mizu. A while ago, as the meal was being prepared, he had gone to the quarter of my brother-in-law Mozammel Haque in one of the three-storied buildings. There I saw my nephew Administrative Officer Abu Taleb, brother-in-law Civil Engineer Mozammel Haque, three cousins Shahidullah, Salimullah and Sana, Store Officer Mr. Chowdhury, Senior Supervisor Mr. Ismail, and his brother-in-law amongst those who were lined up under the coconut trees. Even across the distance, I could understand Mizu was asking permission to come to our quarter. I didn't understand whether he got the permission or not, but I saw him heading towards us. The coconut trees were about 100 to 150 feet away. There was a green patch of grass in between. Mizu had already crossed half of it but that unfinished walk would turn out to be his last.

Suddenly, we were startled by the sound of rifles or Sten guns. I saw Mizu stumble and fall face down on the thick grass. As he tried to get up, another round of bullets hit him and he fell again. Thus started the grisly massacre. All the weapons of the devils began to roar at once. All the faces I knew standing in front of the tree line fell as the rain of bullets from the S.L.Rs, L.M.Gs, and rifles hit them. Heartrending screams of the victims, wails and cries of the terrified onlooking families from every home, mixed with the deafening sound of monstrous machines shook the heavens. Our closed door and windows were also struck by a shower of bullets. We all took shelter on the floor and under the bed. We were madly looking for a safe corner in the room to save our lives. More than half an hour passed by. The gunfire did not stop; neither did the wails of anguish and the screams of terror.

Suddenly, the cries and screams became louder in the quarter next door. In that quarter lived Azizur Rahman, the Assistant Administrative Officer of the mill, along with his family. He was also the General Secretary of the Dhaka office for the Dinajpur Association. I reckoned the military was trying to take him away, and his wife and children were crying and begging to stop them. But their resistance was in vain; the demons decided it wasn't worthwhile to take him outdoors and murdered him right there in his home. Later I went there to see him. The Pakistani beasts had not been satisfied with spraying him with bullets; they had stabbed his entire body with bayonets too.

Each of the housing quarters was being attacked mercilessly in the same manner. Thinking about the situation, we became even more terrified and considered hiding in the passage alley between the lines of latrines behind the quarters. Before I could send out my children and wife in that direction, a group of Punjabi soldier broke through the door. First they started to loot all the valuables. They opened the cabinet, ransacked it, and quickly bagged valuables like watches and radios. While they were busy looting, those of us who could not escape earlier tried to slip out the back but were halted by a young soldier who blocked our way. My brother, our old father and I were trapped. That young soldier brought us to the courtyard of the quarter and made us stand along the wall. Under force, we obeyed his order. He spared our old father, who was looking at us helplessly from a distance. This person, the father of five sons and two daughters, had had his heart broken just a few months ago on April 1, 1971 when he got the news of the death of his youngest son, who was working in the Pakistan Army Ordnance Corps in Saidpur. He had left his own home at Munshipara in Dinajpur town and taken shelter with his third son here at Ghorashal, hoping for the safety of his and his family's lives. But he couldn't outrun the danger. Only moments ago, he had to watch his most talented and handsome fourth son Mizu lying on the field, shot to death. He had been unable to cross that little distance to sit beside his beloved son one last time, for the sake of his and his family's safety. Maybe Mizu was dead by then; or counting the last moments to his death.

But my father did not have time to mourn as he might soon have to witness the death of his two eldest sons, me and Zulfiqar Rahman. For a father, what could possibly be a more painful and heartrending situation than this?

That young Punjabi soldier wasted no time in aiming his rifle at us as he took two steps back after making us stand next to the wall. Only a few moments left. Right then, our youngest sister Tahmina, nicknamed Puti, a student of grade five, rushed out from the back passageway and seized the armed soldier along with his weapon. She started crying and begged the soldier in mixed Bangla and Urdu to not kill us. She was crying, "I had a brother just like you in the military in Saidpur. I heard he has been killed as well. Look, there in the field lies another brother of mine, shot.

Please brother, don't kill my two other brothers. You are like my brother, please don't kill them!"

My brother and I were counting our moments to death. Later, I realized how horrible, unbearable it can be to face death; how it can make a man paralyzed and senseless is beyond description. I don't know whether it was some supernatural power or the pleading of our innocent little sister that awakened some mercy in the soldier that day. Only the merciful Almighty knows if perhaps He Himself decided to be our savior, but we lived.

That unknown teenage soldier consoled my sister telling her not to cry, "Alright sister, your brothers will live, don't cry." Saying this he ordered us to hide under the bunk in the store room and he stood near the door. Every few minutes other soldiers were rushing in like madmen to find if any prey was left behind and he was diverting everyone, "Tumlog udhar jao, hum yaha hain... You guys go over there, I'm here to check." This massacre, this madness, this vicious killing frenzy continued for over an hour. Perhaps because of nightfall, or perhaps due to exhaustion from the craze of the killing spree, it ended eventually. The soldiers rushed to the field when their leader blew a whistle. Sometime later, we figured the monsters had left the mill.

We cautiously came out of the house and rushed to Mizu first, who was still lying on the thick grass. But by that time he had breathed his last. His body was just lying there, silent and still.

The Bird of Life: Tales of '71

Hasan Azizul Huq*

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It was as if nothing had happened. Everything was quiet. The windows and doors of the Daulatpur Brajalal College were all shut tight. There was a strange peace in that silence. It created an illusion that everything was normal. Looking at the tall grass that had grown into bushes up to a person's waist in some places or the cattle sitting in the shades of the trees under the winter sun, one could hardly realize that there was a blood-bath going on in the country. If you listened carefully in all this silence, you could even hear the echo of excitement and life coming from the nearby bazaar. It wasn't impossible to hear the strange grave sounds of the rising tide inside the people, like that of the long dried up river, the Bhairab. In the meantime, on the morning of December 3 or 4, 1971, a notice arrived from the Principal on a torn out piece of paper with the names of seven teachers. My name was second on that list. It stated that the Pakistani Colonel staying at the Khulna Circuit House wished to meet these seven professors. At the end of the note the Principal had added that we should interpret the 'wish' as a 'command'. I understood all too well what that notice in English meant, yet for some reason I still read it for the third time, and felt at a loss. It was as if the notice had started to vanish in front my very eyes. It was almost gone, only the right corner of it was left in my vision, if that too melted away, all of it would evaporate... Just then the noise from the bazaar and the sound of the boatmen from the Bhairab docks reached my ears, and the piece of paper I held in my hands made a ruffling noise. I came back to reality and looked at it again. I noticed that two of the teachers had not yet signed as they lived outside the campus, but the others had already signed.

I was at the Principal's house within five minutes. The tall, thin, and dark man was sitting on a couch with a pale face. He was more lying down than sitting, his eyes half-closed. I went to him and spoke roughly, "What is this, Sir? You have sent our death summons with your own hand." Without moving an inch or opening his eyes, he made a gesture with the palms of his hand and said, "What else could I do?"

"What can you do? Won't you consider our future?"

In my excitement I did not notice till then that three of the other teachers who had signed the Principal's summons, had already arrived and were present in the room. Almost all the windows and doors of the room were closed, and it was quite dark inside even in daylight. They had been sitting on chairs scattered around the room. That is when the fourth person arrived. This person was six feet tall, with an athletic figure. If you looked at him you would know what the term 'broad-chested' really meant. He was well known for being quite daring and he used to carry a pistol with him all the time. But the incidents of the previous nine months had subdued the recklessness in his nature. As he neared us, I saw that his nerves were so jittery that he had come without finishing the daily necessities he had been involved in—one side of his cheek had a cut that was bleeding, the other still had soap on it.

He roared at the Principal, "Why did you send us this notice, Sir?"

The principal replied in a broken voice, "What else was I to do? Do I have more than one head on my neck?" He sat a bit upright and blinked at us, "I was to notify you all, and I did. Why don't you pretend you haven't received the notice? Or you can choose to ignore it altogether, right? It's not like I am forcing you to go."

"But we must consider the safety of our heads as well!" "Then what can I do?" Uttering this, he slumped back on the couch.

We realized that talking to the principal was pointless. The daredevil of a professor was still shaking, but whether from fury or from nervousness I couldn't tell. Another professor reminded him to apply some antiseptic to his cut and to finish his shave. The daredevil didn't get embarrassed but replied, "Right! You think shaving is of importance now, but what happens when we lose our lives? What's the worth of a shave then?"

I interrupted them saying, "But what will we do now? Are we going or not?"

The Principal raised his head from the couch and said, "I got a call from the Circuit House. You are to get there by 10 a.m. They were asking if a Jeep needs to be sent, I had declined immediately."

"That was the correct thing to do. If the Jeep were to come then it would be more like an arrest," said the eldest of the professors.

Today I am not sure, why I had decided to go to the Circuit House that day. I could have just left the college. If we crossed the Bhairab and fled to the villages on the other side, who could have found us? Maybe it was my two little daughters that I thought about, or perhaps I thought of the eighty-six year old man, my father, who sat with his hands clasped together on the easy-chair. By then, we firmly believed that no act was too atrocious for the Pak Army to carry out.

An hour or so afterwards, when I was getting off the rickshaw at the gate of the Circuit House, I could see the huge black military van parked by the field across the gate. All my doubts were dispelled. I still remember, I glanced at the sky one more time. It was bright with the

December sun. The houses of the neat city of Khulna seemed to be submerged in a sleepy delirium. The idyll momentarily engulfed me too. It was like I was bidding farewell to the world.

Everyone knew the black van that was parked there. That was the executioner's van. Many a morning, noon, and night, whether it was light or dark, I had seen this van carry scores of people. Most were young men—captured from the nearby villages. All of them sat in rows, bare-skinned, speechless. They were taken to Gollamari, south of the city, near a cove of the Bhairab. This was the angel of death.

As these visions of horror passed before my eyes. I suddenly had the urge to run away as fast as I could by the paved road on the right. But instead, I found myself entering the gate of the Circuit House with my previously nervous colleague the very next moment. He was calm now, serious and unconcerned, at least that's how it seemed to me.

Entering the hall room of the Circuit House, I found that many others were gathered there. School and college teachers, a few of the principals, lawyers, and doctors—altogether there were some twenty-five to thirty people.

Not a bad game-plan, I thought to myself. If these twenty-five to thirty people were murdered, Khulna would be a 'clean' city! Everyone was talking carefully in a low voice, with bowed heads, looking at the person next to them stealthily. Everyone was trying to be as normal as possible, but a heavy panic would often cast a shadow upon their cheerful faces, as if the panic was working under the layer of cheerfulness. It was like they were cracking jokes with someone while staring at their own skeletons.

We heard the clacking noise of boots. A young officer in uniform came to the door and in bad English informed us that the Colonel would speak to us shortly. The young officer was good looking. He was really quite young. His fair face was oily from perspiration, and his eyes reflected stupidity, arrogance, and hatred all at once. Just then, I saw Rashidul Hasan, the [D.C.](#) †, of Khulna, cross the veranda and rush into the Colonel's chamber. Through the open door, I saw that Rashidul Hasan's clothes were a mess, so was his hair. He didn't turn towards us once. I used to know him. In 1959 or 1960, we had participated in an English debate competition in [Dhaka University](#) †. I didn't suppose he remembered me from back then, but at that time he had managed to make quite an impact on me. Later on, I got to know him afresh as the D.C. of Khulna.

Rashidul Hasan came out of the office of the Colonel after a short time. This time, as he neared the open door, he did look at us. I was not sure whether it was anger, excitement, or frustration, but something made his face turn blood red and eyes crazy—drops of perspiration trickled down his face. All of us were staring at his face, trying to read something from it. He looked at me, but didn't seem to recognize me. He went to the other end of the veranda. A silence fell across the room. So many people who had been talking for so long, suddenly stopped at once. The ticking of the wall-clock was like a loud drum in our ears. Just then the cry of a baby came from a distant place and broke the silence. I cannot express exactly how I felt. The terms 'fear', 'panic', 'terror' cannot really explain the actual feelings of my heart, because I had never experienced a situation like this before. At one point, it seemed to me that I had come quite close to the very end of the mystery called 'life', I would know its answers all too soon!

As far as I can recall now, Rashidul Hasan had returned and entered the Colonel's room once more, but I am not totally sure about that. Standing at the door, he was about to say something to us, but instead he moved away. And then we were called to the Colonel's office.

In the half-dark room, the Colonel was sitting across a huge desk covered in velvet. I couldn't spot him at first. We had entered the room rather clumsily. Someone tumbled on the doorstep, another's feet got tangled in the heavy curtains hanging on the door. The room was dark, and there were not enough chairs for everyone to sit down. After my eyes got accustomed to the darkness I saw the Colonel, a very fair complexioned middle aged man with thinning hair parted in the middle. He kept saying, "Please have your seats, please don't mind the trouble I've given you."

After everyone had entered the room, it became all very quiet, as if every person had frozen in his own place. The Colonel's lips curled up just a little with a hint of a smile. I could see the smile in his eyes as well. But as soon as that smile faded, the face looked terribly unnatural, as if it wasn't the face of a human being at all; it was some other animal. There was a cruel and frozen expression in his eyes, and his face was just a mask—there was a terrible blood thirsty monster hiding behind it.

Maybe all this was my imagination, maybe not.

When the Colonel spoke, we realized that for some reason or other our lives had been spared. In a very slow and calm manner he gave a speech:

"You are the teachers; you are the intellectuals; you are the most worthy citizens of Pakistan. The nation is grateful to you. The nation needs your help in times of crises. We are now in a crisis, India is trying her best to destroy Pakistan ..." And after continually speaking such nonsense for some time he was still not satisfied. There was a suppressed anger and irritation still on his face.

He uttered something like, "Khuda Pakistan ko hefazat kare... May the Lord save Pakistan," and dismissed us. I really cannot put my finger on whether it was December 3 or 4. As soon as I returned to the college from the Circuit House, three bombers flew overhead with a thundering noise. That was the first time I saw bombers. I cannot recall if I had seen bombers during the [war of 1965](#) †. They turned around and flew very low with a cracking noise. Although they disappeared quickly, the angry bee-like hum hung in the air for a while. I understood that these might drop bombs anytime but had no idea what damage a bomber could actually do, so I actually enjoyed watching them! Around that evening, we saw the first heavy tanks in the ashen darkness. For the next four days the long restless withdrawal went on; the Pakistan Army was retreating. Leaning on the closed iron gate of the college, I looked at the procession of tanks, heavy artillery, trucks, vans, and Jeeps shaking the roads in the darkness. The Pakistanis were retreating. I thought to myself where would they escape to when they reached Khulna. The only place further south was the Bay of Bengal.

I went to the quiet and dark two-storied house of the Principal and found the tall man half lying on the bed throwing his fists towards the open western window and saying, "Beat 'em, beat 'em with your shoes, beat 'em with your shoes!"

The next day the first bomb hit the oil tank near the college right at 10 a.m. That one sound shattered all our romanticism with the blitz from the movies. The reality of desperation and suffering set in when we saw the death and destruction right in front of us. Huge pillars of dark smoke rose to the sky and the four bombers returned again and again like angry wasps. As I dragged my old parents into the trench that was dug that very morning and held my daughters' heads down, I witnessed a plane sweep up and then down and drop a bomb right on the jute storehouse on the opposite river bank. Thus it began.

I am not sure even today why we were let free—whether it was because the Colonel did not want to go through the trouble of killing about thirty people during the retreat, or if Rashidul Hasan had interfered somehow and managed to prevent our execution that day. Rashidul Hasan's father also wrote the exact same thing to me. I didn't know then, and I don't know now. I couldn't give any confirmation to that old gentleman. But I keep picturing the worried and desperate look on his face. I want to believe that it was due to his earnest efforts that we managed to escape the Circuit House alive that day.

□ Hasan Azizul Huq is a renowned author who has won national awards such as Bangla Academy Literary Awards, the Ekushey Padak, etc. He is retired as a full Professor from the University of Rajshahi and he continues to write.

Miraculous Survival

K. M. Shafiullah*

Major General (Retd.) Bir Uttam

High Commissioner, Bangladesh High Commission, London, UK

The terrible experience that I had gone through on December 6, 1971 was just as unimaginable as my miraculous survival. I was only saved by the grace of God. Before getting into the main story, I think it is relevant to describe my involvement in the Liberation War in 1971.

On March 1, 1971, the National Assembly of Pakistan was postponed. There was a huge uproar in the country. That same day, Khaled Mosharraf* visited my residence to discuss the overall situation. I was the second in command of the 2nd [East Bengal Regiment](#) † posted in Joydebpur but I was residing in the Dhaka [Cantonment](#) †. He came by in the evening and looked very tense. The first thing he said upon entering was, “It seems that our weapons will be seized soon.” I remember replying, “We were trained to uphold our weapons, not surrender them.”

During that time, it was quite expected to receive such instructions from the Pakistan Army authorities. We, the Bangali soldiers of the then Pakistan Army, faced great uncertainty and confusion regarding the tense situation. But we prepared ourselves, with the arms and ammunitions we had, for anything that might happen. We had to be prepared because no one really knew what was going on. On March 19, the Pakistan army got involved in a skirmish with the people of Joydebpur. They might have gotten some idea about our preparation from that incident and refrained from executing their plan to disarm us.

Lt. Colonel Masudul Hasan Khan, the Commanding Officer of our 2nd East Bengal Regiment was a Bangali. I was the Second in Command. Although we were the senior most officers, the junior West Pakistani officers were called into Dhaka for urgent briefings. Their elaborate conspiracy became evident on February 27. The Bengal Regiment under our command was divided into smaller groups and disbursed to Tangail, Mymensingh, Joydebpur, Rajendrapur, and other places.

Later, this move would actually come to our benefit. On March 27, I went to Joydebpur, Gazipur, and Rajendrapur to inspect the distributed second Bengal Regiment and informed everyone of our plan. We were to abandon our posts to congregate in Mymensingh. According to the plan, everyone left their post on March 28 and reached Mymensingh by the 29th. On March 29, we were able to pick up two wireless messages of the Pakistan Army. The wireless messages were between Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Kushtia. From those messages, we found out that the Pakistan Army had suffered a number of casualties in both places. Zia ([Major Ziaur Rahman](#)) † was the Commanding Officer of Bengal Regiment in Chittagong then. We came to know that Zia had declared mutiny. Zia and I were course mates. We were to be promoted in May, 1971; however that order never arrived. I too declared a mutiny in Mymensingh. This changed the situation considerably. As I had gathered a battalion in Mymensingh, it was only normal for the Pakistan Army to think that I would proceed to capture Dhaka by road or by rail. I did use the rail tracks but not the direct route from Mymensingh to Dhaka. Instead, I took the Kishoreganj-Bhairab route and approached Dhaka from the east.

I fought against the Pakistan Army from within Bangladesh until June 21. After that, I had to cross the border. I had to, I could not fight like this anymore. At the beginning of the war, there were four infantry divisions, two artillery divisions, one armored division, and a huge amount of other weapons and ammunition in just Dhaka. One might justifiably ask how we, with our limited resources and under-supplied soldiers, could make a stand against one of the best trained armies in the world. The truth is, in order to defend our country, to protect our nation and people, we had no other choice. The deep and selfless love we held for our country instilled courage and a sense of purpose in us—that we could fight any enemy, overcome any obstacle.

We had taken an oath as soldiers. Breaking that oath and declaring mutiny had only one punishment—the death penalty. But rebellion needs a valid reason and we had one. We fought against the enemy, the Pakistani army, to earn our independence. I should mention that, during the Liberation War in 1971, every one of us—ordinary people, politicians, and military personnel—had come together as equals. There was no distinction between us. It is our great misfortune that such an exceptional unity among the people was lost after the war. Neither did we expect all the changes of the later days.

Now to the incident on December 6—the day I was miraculously saved from death. After five days of intense battle, the Pakistani Army were defeated in Akhaura and they surrendered on December 5. After the surrender, the joint forces of Bangladesh and India, known as the ‘ [Mitro Bahini](#) ’ †, marched forward towards Brahmanbaria. The Indian forces were moving by the rail tracks while my force took the Sylhet road. My intention was to reach Brahmanbaria before the Indian forces. To arrive faster, I issued two orders to the 11th East Bengal Regiment, the advancing battalion of the [S-Force](#) † commanded by me. The orders were:

- a) To block the Sylhet highway on the north of Chandura so that the enemy could not approach us from behind.
- b) To make sure that the road between Chandura and Sarail was free.

To carry out these orders, Major Nasim (Major General A. S. M. Nasim, Bir Bikram), the commander of the advancing battalion of my forces ordered his ‘Alpha Company’ commander Major Subid Ali Bhuiyan (Retired as Major General - Editor) to create a roadblock near the bridge over a canal located one mile north-east of Chandura. Then Nasim moved forward through Horoshpur on Sarail highway towards Chandura with the rest of the soldiers of the battalion. Once they reached Pikepara near Chandura, Subid Ali Bhuiyan informed them that the road

block was constructed successfully. This was obviously very good news. Then Nasim ordered his battalion to move forward using the main road since the blockade on the road behind them ensured that the enemy would not be able to attack them from behind. I was becoming emotional to think that Chandura, Shahbazzpur, Sarail, and Brahmanbaria would soon be free from the enemy. I became impatient. We had to move faster. Besides, we were also trying to keep pace with the Indian division that was coming in from the south.

It was one o'clock in the afternoon when I reached Pikepara along with my Runner. The company commanded by Lt. Nazrul was advancing at a steady pace. About a thousand yards behind that advancing company, I met Nasim at the battalion headquarters. There were eight of us there. The enemy had retreated from Chandura to Shahbazzpur. Nazrul's advancing company picked up their pace. I was afraid that the Pakistani Army might blow up the Shahbazzpur Bridge to slow down our progress. I ordered my troops to take possession of the bridge as soon as possible so that their plans could be foiled.

Once we reached Islampur, we saw a truck approaching us from behind. The color of the truck was similar to one of our 11th East Bengal Regiment's. Major Nasim guessed that the soldiers of Sector 3 might have taken control over Teliapara. I should mention that our soldiers were in India, on the other side of the border from Teliapara. So without taking over Teliapara, it would not have been possible for our vehicles to come this way. Also Subid Ali had informed us that the north-east of Chandura was completely blocked off. So, we did not expect that any enemy truck could be behind us at all. Once the truck came close to us we signaled it to stop and the driver stopped the truck. Suddenly we realized that the truck belonged to the retreating Pakistani Army and it was carrying Pakistani soldiers. We were greatly outnumbered by the soldiers on the truck. They were equally surprised to see us. They had actually been trying to flee from their enemy forces when they suddenly came face to face with that same force. That is the moment when my dreadful experience began. A terrifying sequence of events took place within minutes of the truck's arrival. As is customary for the victorious leader, I ordered the defeated soldiers to raise their hands above their heads and surrender. Some of them obeyed my order but a few of them jumped out of the truck and ran for the village while shooting randomly. Suddenly, a tall Pakistani [Subedar](#) † who was sitting in the front seat jumped at me. I was not at all ready for such an attack. All of a sudden, I was wrestling him.

The advancing company was already a kilometer ahead of us moving towards Shahbazzpur when this incident was taking place in Islampur. The company behind us was still 1.5 to 2 kilometers away. By the appearance of the enemy soldiers, I was certain that they were of Pathan origin, from the north-west border of Pakistan. The Subedar who jumped at me was a brawny young fellow. It was not easy to beat this tall and healthy Pathan. Our guns were in our holsters but neither of us could reach for them. As we were scuffling, my Runner [Sepoy](#) † Mannan tried in vain to aim his Sten gun at the Subedar. His barrel would point at the Subedar one moment, and at me the next. He could not risk shooting me.

In the meantime, Nasim was shot in the hips while Mannan had taken a bullet in his knee. At last, I defeated the Subedar with some Judo moves and punches. I was quite famous as a cadet for my boxing skills. Although boxing was only a hobby, in this case it saved my life. Otherwise it would have been impossible for me to beat that Goliath sized Pathan. First, I kned him in the abdomen, and then followed that with an uppercut to his jaw. He fell on the ground but very quickly jumped behind Mannan and grasped his Sten gun. Sepoy Mannan was lying on the ground after being shot in the knee. Then he fired at me using Mannan as a shield in front of him. He fired the Sten gun from only a yard away. There was no chance of missing the target. But I did not notice anything except the sound of the Sten gun. At this time, another soldier was trying to aim at the Pakistani Subedar but could not fire as the Subedar was using Mannan for cover. I ran towards him, took his rifle and hit the Subedar on the head using the rifle stock. The Subedar fell to the ground but I kept hitting him in a dazed state. He became senseless and I thought he was dead. However, the next day I came to know that he was alive; but that is another story.

All of this happened within seconds. There were only a few spectators to this sudden dramatic incident. I was standing alone with two of my soldiers dead, Nasim shot and bleeding heavily from his bullet wound—there was no one around me. The advancing team heard the gunshots behind them and turned around towards Islampur, while the team behind us got alarmed and approached us very cautiously. But before either of the teams could reach us, a bus came from behind carrying twenty five Pakistani soldiers. I was planning to start firing at them as they got off the bus, but realized that the rifle I was holding was broken from the blow to the Subedar's head. My Sten gun was with Mannan but he had already crawled to safety by that time. My last option was my pistol but when I drew it I found that the pistol was broken too. Actually, when the Pakistani Subedar had fired at me from just a yard away, two bullets hit my pistol and destroyed it. The pistol had shielded me from the bullets and saved my life. I put the pistol back in the holster and dived into a nearby pond to save my life. I submerged my whole body into the thick mud of the pond to hide myself.

The Pakistani soldiers quickly got down from the bus and positioned themselves on the ground, around the village and near the pond I was hiding in. The Pakistani soldiers were wearing grey militia shirts and khaki pants while I had an olive colored army uniform. My uniform had also become gray because of the mud; I got a natural camouflage. I was all alone and surrounded by enemy soldiers. Left with no weapon, I felt absolutely helpless in the middle of the muddy pond. But I thought to myself that it was better to die facing the enemy than drowning in the mud. The thought dispelled any fear from my mind. I recalled Allah's name, got up from the pond, and walked 200 yards to take shelter in a hut. Because of the mud, the color of my clothes had become similar to the Pakistani soldiers. This and the fact that I also walked with such confidence probably made the Pakistani Army think that I was one of them. So they did not pay any particular attention to me as I walked right under their noses.

Sometimes these types of extraordinary things happen on the battlefield that might seem abnormal in regular circumstances. I must say that it was the grace of Allah that saved me that day. I had a small Quran Sharif on a chain around my neck. While I crossed those two hundred yards, I kept a hand on that Quran and kept praying to Allah to give me at least one weapon and not let me die unarmed. Surely, Allah had listened to my prayers on that day; otherwise why would no enemy have recognized me! As soon as I got into the hut, my two battalions attacked the enemy from the front and the back. An intense battle broke out. The enemy soldiers suffered great losses and started to retreat. Twenty five of them were killed and eleven were captured. The next day, three more enemy soldiers were captured. We also suffered significant losses. Two of our soldiers were martyred and eleven got injured. [Havildar](#) † Rafiq and [Sepoy](#) † Mujibar Rahman fought like true heroes and sacrificed their lives. Lt. Nazrul Islam, Havildar Abul Kalam, and [Naik](#) † Mostofa Ali are worthy of mention among those who fought with great courage in that battle.

Our doctor Lt. Moinul was also injured in the fight and at that moment no one else was there to treat the injured soldiers. Chandura was the nearest place where we could get medical help. To avoid any further delay, we used the Pakistani Army's truck to carry the injured soldiers and started towards Chandura. I took the wheels. At that time, one of the teams behind us was coming from Chandura and saw our truck on the road. They thought it was an enemy truck and started firing their machine guns. This type of panic and friendly fire is not uncommon in a war or battlefield, but at that moment I could not think of anything to stop them. Perhaps someone recognized me and the firing stopped. Thus we were saved. It was critical to get the injured soldiers some medical care and I had no time to spare. So I started driving for Chandura again.

But as we approached Chandura and met the very last company of my battalion, we were again mistaken as an escaping enemy vehicle and faced a new round of bullets. Bullets shattered the windscreen of the truck. I tried to signal to them in many ways who I was. At last they recognized my cap and stopped firing.

Although the windshield was shattered I was able to escape without a scratch. I have no other explanation for this other than it could've only been through the limitless grace of Allah. We finally reached Chandura. But there was no hospital in Chandura. The local doctors provided some first aid treatment before the injured were sent off to Agartala (India) on stretchers. Nasim was badly injured and incapable of commanding the battalion anymore. He was bleeding excessively. Even then, as we were sending him to Agartala in a stretcher, he was concerned, "Sir, who is going to look after my battalion? Please let me stay with them."

I told him that he needed surgery immediately and assured him about his battalion. There were tears in his eyes as he left. During the Liberation War, such attachment, devotion, and sincerity were ever present among all the officers and soldiers.

□ *Khaled Mosharraf* Khaled Mosharraf was appointed Commanding Officer of the 4th Bengal Regiment in the Comilla [Cantonment](#) † on March 24, 1971. He led the Regiment in mutiny following the Declaration of Independence. He was appointed the Sector Commander of Sector 2 by the [Mujibnagar Government](#) † (Bangladesh Government in Exile) on April 30, 1971. He was then made the chief of the [K-Force](#) † of [Mukti Bahini](#) †. Mosharraf was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel during the Liberation War. He was wounded by a bullet shot in his head during the war and recovered after a long treatment. After liberation, he was appointed Staff Officer at the army headquarters in Dhaka. Later he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier and then elevated to the post of Chief of General Staff of Bangladesh Army. He was also awarded with the gallantry award 'Bir Uttam' by the government of Bangladesh.

□ Major General Kazi Mohammad Shafiullah was the Second in Command of 2nd East Bengal Regiment that revolted with six officers on the night of [March 25](#) †, 1971. During the Liberation War, he was the Sector Commander of Sector 3. Then he became the Brigade Commander of the [S-force](#) †. After liberation, he was appointed as Chief of Army Staff from 1971 to 1975. Then he served in ambassadorial appointment overseas. He was awarded with the gallantry award 'Bir Uttam' by the Government of Bangladesh for his bravery in the Liberation War.

Aleem's Mutilated Body

Shyamoli Chowdhury

Vice-Principal, Udayan Bidyaloy, Dhaka

While everyone was celebrating on [December 16](#) †, raising flags, shouting ' [Joy Bangla](#) ' † at the top of their voices, I was looking for my husband's dead body in the dumping grounds. I was ready to face a thousand bullets to see that dearest face once more. There were a lot of stray bullets fired on that day. Many would fall victim to those random bullets on December 16, but none of the bullets touched me. May be fate wanted me to be the witness to Aleem's murder.

On December 3, 1971, when Dhaka was under attack, we prepared ourselves to leave the house and stay in the hospital. But Mowlana Abdul Mannan, whom we had given shelter in our downstairs, convinced Aleem against this plan. He had sought shelter in our house around mid-July. Our neighbor, Mr. Matin, who worked at the then PDP, brought him to my husband. Mr. Matin said that the Mowlana and his family were in big trouble. Their house had been burnt down and they had nowhere to go. Typical to his nature, Aleem agreed to help him despite my strong objections. The Mowlana and his family moved into the rooms downstairs. We moved out all the equipment of the eye hospital and made room for them. Within fifteen or twenty days, the Mowlana's true nature was exposed but it was too late by then. There was no doubt that we had made a huge mistake when we found out that there were Pakistani soldiers regularly visiting the building, and there were night-long parties and armed [Al-Badr](#)s † on guard. The Mowlana continued to mislead Aleem with his false assurances. He always said, "Doctor, I will never forget what you did for me. You have nothing to be afraid of. If you are in trouble, just come to me. No one can harm you as long as I am alive."

One morning, the government houses were being bombarded. We took shelter under the stairs, with Neepa and Shampa. My mother was bedridden, never leaving the side of my sick father; Deepa (my sister) was also with them. It felt like the house was going to collapse on us. The government house was not far from our home in Purana Paltan. At that moment, I thought we were definitely going to die. I was feeling more helpless for our two daughters. When the bombing ceased for some time, I told Aleem, "If not for us, then at least for the children's sake, we have to leave this house. This is in no way a safe place." He agreed and a little later, he got ready and went out with the car to make living arrangements in the hospital.

At that time, he was working at Salimullah Medical College Mitford Hospital*. After two hours, he came back with a dejected face. So many people had taken shelter in Mitford Hospital that the Principal said, "Sorry Aleem, I cannot give you permission to stay here. You better stay at your home. We might need you at any moment." (Looking back, now I wonder if the Principal also knew that Aleem would be captured. It would be a lot of hassle to arrest a doctor from the hospital, and may be that is why he did not give him permission to stay there).

I gave him a blank look. I was speechless with fear and disappointment. Aleem tried to soothe me saying, "Don't be so afraid. Let's stay here today, we will leave tomorrow." Although he was putting on a brave face, I knew he was scared too. He used to say, "I don't fear death, but the thought of dying helplessly like a coward is devastating." Sometimes he would say, "I am not worried about myself, but if they kill me, what will you do with the two little kids?" At that time Neepa was three years old and Shampa was only two. Some nights, he used to hold them tight, and keep them close while sleeping—he was terrified. But the

Mowlana's fake words of assurance confused him. It was because of those words that we ended up not leaving the house at all. But Aleem often said, "I don't know if I am making a mistake or not." In between the bomb raids during the day and the darkness of the blacked-out nights, I never realized when misfortune had come knocking at my door.

The morning of December 15 was just like any other. Aleem got ready to go to Mitford. “We must leave the house today,” I told him. He agreed with me and promised to make living arrangements. When the curfew ceased, he left with our car. I gave him a tin can to bring some kerosene on his way back, and once again gave him a reminder. But it did not work. He was so caught up in the hospital that we did not get enough time to leave before the curfew started, despite the fact that we were fully prepared. After lunch, Neepa and Shampa were taking a nap like every day. My mother, Aleem and I were sitting in the balcony and watching the bomb raid over Pilkhana*. Sensing the approaching moment of victory, Aleem could not hold his excitement. Suddenly, the sound of a car in front of the house got us on our feet. We saw a microbus with its windows smeared with mud stop near the Mowlana’s entrance. I did not pay any extra attention to it as it was a common scenario those days. Aleem asked me not to peep outside too much and went to our bed room.

Within a few minutes, there was a knock on the door. I peered through the upstairs window and saw two [Al-Badr](#) † soldiers pointing guns at our door. I asked Aleem if I should open the door. He told me to open the door and rushed downstairs. I asked him, “Where are you going?” He said, “I am going to the Mowlana. He told me to go to him if we are in trouble.” I did not stop him. He kept knocking at the door and asking for help. But the Mowlana did not open his door. He replied from inside, “You go ahead with them. I am right behind you.” Once again, Aleem took false hope in his words. Their car was a little distance away from our house, so it took them a few minutes to walk to the Jeep. In the meantime, I begged the Mowlana with all my heart to do something. But Mowlana just stood there, looking away. After the car left, I broke into tears. Then he said, “Don’t be upset. My students have taken him for some eye treatment.” I realized that he knew everything. I came back upstairs, thinking Aleem would be back after their work was done.

The night grew older; my ears were alert for any sound on the door with a hope that he will return any moment. The dinner got cold on the table. Neepa and Shampa fell asleep. Deepa, my mother and I were awake, clueless about what to do. After several attempts, I finally reached Mrs. Rabbee on the phone. The Mowlana told me that they had also taken [Dr. Rabbee](#) †. I heard Mrs. Rabbee’s sobs from the other side of the phone, “Will they ever come back?” I was stunned, I could not believe it. Up to that point, the thought of Aleem not returning never crossed my mind. The whole night, I stayed awake, waiting for his return. It was a winter night and he did not have any warm clothes with him. I mentioned that to the Mowlana to which he replied, “They will provide him with clothes.” The night passed. I thought he would definitely be back in the morning. I was looking out onto the road as far as I could see from the balcony. Around 8 a.m., suddenly, I heard people shouting ‘[Joy Bangla](#)’ †. There were people on the rooftops, raising flags of an independent Bangladesh. I quickly sent Hakim and Momin (my household helps) to Gendaria to tell Aleem’s younger brother Hafiz what had transpired. My two brothers had left for the war long ago, I had no one else to ask to help look for Aleem. Sometime later, the Mowlana came upstairs with a bag and begged me to give him shelter, or else they would kill him. I did not know what to say. I told him to go to our dining hall.

Hakim and Momin came back around noon. They had not been able to make it to Gendaria. There was indiscriminate gunfire on all the streets. Our phone was out of order. So I could not contact Hafiz that day. A [Muktijoddha](#) † came with an S.L.R in his hand and asked, “Where is that monster that killed Aleem vai?”

Upon hearing that, I was dumbstruck. This could not be true. It might be that he did not know the truth. During all this, we did not even notice when the Mowlana had escaped. On December 17, Kabir and another freedom fighter came and assured me that they would find Aleem. Then they left and never came back. May be they too, in search for Aleem, had joined the list of martyrs. Hafiz finally managed to come on the 17th. There were quite a few others who came to see us on that day. By then, I knew that Aleem was not alive. I requested everyone to bring him back, in whatever condition they could find him. I was also on the roads, looking for him. There were victory processions of freedom fighters everywhere, shouting ‘Joy Bangla’. The procession which I had dreamed to be a part of brought only anguish and despair to me that day. Defeated, I came back home. No one could give me any hope.

On December 18, we got the news. Aleem was lying dead in the Rayerbazar [Boddho-bhumi](#) † along with many other intellectuals. Aleem, Dr. Rabbee, Ladu vai, and many others were found in a brick field. Hafiz recognized Dr. Rabbee at once. He was lying on his back. Aleem’s body lay there facing down. Hafiz could not recognize him at first and came back. Ershad and Aftab, friends of my brother and Mr. Khan (Aleem’s friend) were also looking for his body. Hakim and Momin were with them too. They were the first to recognize him. Since the two of them were present at the time he was taken away, they had been able to recognize him by the clothes he was wearing. Momin ran back home shouting that he had found him. He rushed back to the site with a white sheet to bring him home.

I thought to myself how priceless this moment was—to find a lost one, to have a look at his face once more. But when I saw him, I realized that it would have been better not to look. May be if I had not seen the mutilated corpse of the man whom I had loved and cherished so dearly, I would have not have been haunted by the sheer inhumanity of it. May be I would not have had to bear the immense pain that I do today. They brought Aleem back covered with a sheet. He returned home on a microbus again. Deepa yelled from the window, “Don’t look. You won’t be able to bear it.” But that was not possible. How could I send him away without even looking at him? Especially when he was this close? I do not remember who took me to his body. Aleem was lying straight on the ground. I said I wanted to see his face closely. Someone removed the sheet. I looked at Aleem, sleeping. Signs of severe torture were on his body. His face had blackened from the excruciating pain. There was a deep bayonet wound on the left of his forehead. His chest had been riddled with bullets. There was also a wound from a bayonet in his lower abdomen. His whole body was covered in blood. The washcloth they used to blindfold him when they took him away was hanging around his neck. His hands were tied behind his back. He was still wearing his shirt and [lungi](#) †.

Oh! The pain he must have gone through before death! When they made all of them stand in a line, blindfolded, hands tied behind their back, when they mercilessly slashed with bayonets, when thousands of bullets pierced their bodies, what did they do? What were they thinking? Were they thinking about themselves, their kids, or this country of theirs? Or the life that they left behind? What was their crime that they had to die like this? How much grudge did the Al-Badr’s hold against them? One bullet is enough to kill someone. Then why did they shoot them so many times? Why did they torture them with bayonets? Aleem, Rabbee, and the others—they were all humanists. Serving the country was their motto. Poor villagers, rickshaw pullers, and slum dwellers used to get free treatment from them. They were known as being friendly. They would offer help even to their enemies. They possessed a great passion and love for our country in their heart. May be that is why they had to sacrifice their lives at the hands of those whose lies and hypocrisy disgust the people of our country even today. We live a life without security and honor. Speaking the truth is dangerous. Those butchers of 1971 are very much active today. How dare they hold important positions in our society and country? How long will they live with such arrogance in an independent Bangladesh with masks covering their true faces? When will we recognize these culprits?

Aleem’s funeral was held on December 18. The snow white coffin garb slowly faded from my sight. Only the memories of love and respect

remained .

- *Pilkhana* Pilkhana is the current headquarters of the Bangladesh Border Guard, previously Bangladesh Rifles. Up till 1971, it was headquarters to the [East Pakistan Rifles](#) †.
- *Salimullah Medical College Hospital* (Mitford Hospital) Sir Salimullah Medical College is one of the oldest and most prominent government medical colleges in Bangladesh. It was established in 1875 on Mitford Road, Babubazar, Dhaka. The hospital section is also referred to as Mitford Hospital.

My Apologies

Dr. Nilima Ibrahim

Playwright, Researcher, Educator,

Retired Professor, Department of Bangla, [University of Dhaka](#) †

The editor has requested me to narrate the most horrific, heart wrenching, and touching incident that took place during the time of the Liberation War. But it is a difficult task. First, I must state that from [March 25](#) †, 1971 till [December 16](#) †, 1971 I did not step out of the boundary of Bangladesh, then named East Pakistan. I'm not a 'Muktijoddha' trained across the borders. Second, I feel that the liberty that [Bangabandhu](#) † had promised us and the liberty that we have achieved are not the same. We have achieved an independent nation—a geographic location, a flag, a specific national anthem, and an unstable sovereignty. But did the war of independence truly liberate us and set us free? I do not think so. I cannot feel the liberty in my heart, soul, or brain. But it cuts right through my heart when someone discards the whole period as merely a time of turbulence, and with this feeble, old voice I rise up in protest.

I was told to write about one event. A single point in time. But as I try to write, it appears that I cannot concentrate on a fixed point. It is as if I move into circles that surround and revolve around the point. It is a geometrically established fact that a point begets a circle. That point serves as the center of the circle. So sometimes I may move far away from the center, but I will try to come back to the central point.

After December 16, when the late [Mr. Tajuddin](#) † returned, I went to the [Bangabhaban](#) † with my son-in-law Mr. Rajiuddin, who was a Member of the Parliament at that time. As we were listening to the breathtaking tales of the Prime Minister, suddenly a gentleman spoke, "How would you realize the misery of the refugees? While you were comfortable..." I could not let him finish that day. I acknowledged that the people who were refugees in India faced hardship; but they were under the generous hospitality of India, on their land, under the protection from the Indian army. "I do realize your hardship," I said. "But do you know about the pains and sufferings of the people who were stuck within their own country? Do you know the distress of the dying? Have you ever heard the loud gunshots and the sound of bombs raining down around you while you are on the run? Have you seen the body of a farmer, holding his sickle in his hand, lying dead on the bank of the river? Have you ever starved? Have you ever spent sleepless nights panicking and trembling? Have you ever heard the cry of a helpless father holding his dying offspring to his chest while surrounded by experienced doctors but no medicine?"

The gentleman left the place immediately. I do not know from where I got such a spirited voice that day. Perhaps the sense of mortification and suffering that had for so long been pent up inside me removed all sense of politeness and made me retort back with harsh reality.

The whole year of '69 was turbulent. We were at the center of it all, surrounded by student cohorts in [Dhaka University](#) †. At that time, Dhaka University was the center of conscience and altruism, the latent power and self-sacrifice of Bangla. There was no distinction amongst the students and a handful of teachers. The student leaders did not spend the nights in the student dormitories for a long time. Some of the teachers' homes became their temporary residences. My home was not an exception. My three daughters (the first and the second were married) prepared food for them and those youngsters slept through the nights uninterrupted on makeshift beds over the carpet using cushions as pillows. Sheikh Mani, Tofael, Razzak, Khaled Mohammad Ali, Aminul Haque Badshah were among them. Some of them are now in different echelons of life and some of them are resting in peace forever. Dire as those days were, I still think these to be the golden days of my life.

The atrocious experience of March 25 is not my personal story, it is of the whole country. At midnight, I found my telephone dead. Just moments before, Raju (Rajiudin) had informed me that tanks were rolling down the road and the firing had begun. Bangabandhu did not listen to anyone and stayed in his house at [Dhanmondi Road no. 32](#) †. I saw all the lights go off in [Iqbal Hall](#) †. The dogs were howling mad when the rampage started. Rocket launchers lit up the sky like fireworks; cannons roared and drowned the human cries. We were situated right in the middle of the battlefield—it felt as if we were on an isolated island, unaware of what was happening to our neighbors. I hoped that the massacre and destruction would stop with the call for morning prayers, but the [Azaan](#) † stopped halfway. We could still hear the gunfire and smell the gunpowder in the air. I came out cautiously to my patio and saw that the Pakistani Army were dragging out half-burnt bodies from the canteen of Iqbal Hall. My daughters were calling me frantically to come inside the house. I thought that was the most dire moment of my life and it could not get any worse. But all of a sudden, I saw that a few military men were dragging Chishty. He was trying his utmost to free himself.

As he was a journalist, I knew him closely. Moments later, I heard gunshots and he himself became the news. Thus, the day expired; so did the night. We listened to the gunshots, detached from the world without any way to communicate with anyone else. On the morning of the 27th, we listened to [Yahya](#) †'s radio address. At the same time, we heard another voice crying out insanely outside. I ran outside and saw that Sofa* was screaming, "They are all dead, [Govinda Dev](#) † is no more, Jyotirmoy [Guhathakurta](#) † is no more, Muniruzzaman* Sir is dead, Mukhtadir* too." Lamenting like a mad man, he circled around the campus. Right at that moment, Khaled Mohammad Ali, then a Member of Parliament, came by swiftly riding a bicycle. He narrated everything without stopping and advised us to flee from our home. I had seen his courage on the day that Asad* died. He was there, right beside Asad. He came to my place directly from the procession, barefooted but for a sock on one foot and his whole body covered in blood. And yet there was such determination and self-belief in him! I have no idea where he is now—maybe he is a

recluse. Those boys with hearts of gold are not to be found anywhere anymore.

Moments later, [Zahir Raihan](#)†, an ex-student of mine came to my house along with my son-in-law (husband of the eldest daughter) Alamgir Kabir. They insisted that we move to a safe place by Zahir's car—it was more of an order than a request. I sent them on their way. But then we left too—in the clothes we were wearing, taking nothing but all the cash I had at home.

Sometimes I wonder, Zahir had come to take me to safety but why had he never thought about his own safety? We sought shelter at my daughter's in-law, Mr. Afsaruddin's house at Sharat Gupta Road of Narinda in [Old Dhaka](#)†. With that I stepped out of my familiar circle and stepped inside a second one—unknown and uncertain. It would seem like a terrible nightmare to any human society or nation, but for us it was a necessity!

Finally, after numerous discussions, we left Dhaka. We saw a rickshaw deserted beside the Demra road and the dead body of the rickshaw-puller half-eaten by some carnivore animals. We saw abandoned neighborhoods with burnt down houses. We saw a number of military men lying on the roof of the Adamjee Mills*. After spending a night at Afsaruddin [bhai](#)'s† house in Narsingdi, we came to his family home in Adiabab. The small house had a large yard as well as a large drawing room—all the facilities that we were accustomed to in town, and a picturesque garden in the front. Bushes of big red roses and tuberose in the garden welcomed us. Afsaruddin bhai took care of the garden himself. It was blissful. The place seemed far away, a safe and secure refuge detached from the battlefield. We felt great relief for the time being. But suddenly someone brought the news of the arrival of the military. Raju and his force had uprooted the Bhairav-bound train line. The military had received information that he was staying with us and were coming for revenge. We ran for our lives. I was holding Elora, my ten months old granddaughter. We could not go far as both of us were a bit heavy-set.

I spent the whole day hiding in a jute field, muffling her face with my hand to keep her quiet.

The military did not come that day. The villagers told them that Raju's house was on the opposite side of the village. One by one, all of us returned except for Raju and Mintu (Alamgir). They had gone straight to Agartala (India). We hoped that with this the danger would pass. But for our own safety, each night we would take shelter in a different house—in the husking room or the kitchen. Meanwhile, the Indian radio station 'Akashvani' declared me and [Sufia Kamal](#)† deceased and that turned out to be a curse for me. Sufia Kamal was bravely staying in Dhaka and her voice was heard over the radio debunking the false story, but everyone wondered about me. In mid-August, I returned to Dhaka, [burqa](#)† clad, along with my '[lungi](#)†-[panjabi](#)†' wearing husband carrying a bundle (containing everything we had) over his shoulder. After staying in Narinda for a few days, we returned to our home at Fuller Road. My husband and I had decided not to endanger the villagers who kept us safe for six long months as if we were their close relatives. Also, if we had to bid farewell, we preferred to do it near our home, amongst familiar faces. It would be better to die in a place where all the revolutionaries had given their lives than to die at the corner of a house like a plague-infected rat or becoming a decomposed corpse by the roadside. [Munier](#)† was aghast when he saw me and started admonishing me but he stopped once I counter-attacked.

I entered my third circle. I would go to the department at Dhaka University, have discussions, have good meals, and take tea frequently. It felt good to hear explosions here and there. The sound of machine guns, the blast of transformers felt like a heavenly pleasure in the pitch dark night. But then again, my heart trembled when we got the gruesome news of atrocities.

As the bombing by the Indian Air Force began, I entered the fourth circle and felt sheer excitement, thrill, and joy. It seemed that Bangladesh's independence was only a matter of time. Curfew was declared on December 12 starting from 2 p.m. Afsaruddin bhai was a lawyer, an experienced politician, and ex-Member of Parliament. He had realized the situation quite well and forcefully took us with him. We started at 12 p.m. and just before leaving, I received a phone call from Munier urging us to leave at once. He said he was leaving as well. Both of us left but our destinations turned out to be very different. On December 15 at 7 p.m., we heard a loud roar, "Naraye Takbir, Allahu Akbar." One or two boys still remaining in the area came running with the news that the non-Bengali workers of the Adamjee Mills were heading that way. There was no escape. The house of Narinda was filled with women and children from the neighborhood at once.

The whole neighborhood had an unwavering admiration and trust in Mr. Afsaruddin. Three of his four sons were fighting for Bangladesh at home and abroad. The only men left in the house were the two elderly men—Mr. Afsaruddin and my husband. The guns in their family had not been submitted to the authorities as per instruction. The rifles and bullets were taken out of their hidden place by breaking down the walls. The two of them cleaned up the rifles and took position on either side of the main gate. If they were to go down, they were going to take a few of the enemy with them. As the roar outside got closer, our hearts started beating faster. The women were praying upstairs, some were crying holding their infants to their bosom. Though I was trying to comfort them, I felt numb myself. A couple of young boys were bringing updates from outside. The roars stopped at around 11 p.m. A boy brought the good news that the mob had changed direction towards Bangram. The next day we came to know that they had left no Bangalis alive in that area. I wish I could say that night was the darkest and the most dreadful night of my life—a night filled with fear and terror. But alas! Another terrible circle was waiting for me—a circle that would never let me go back to the center, my point of peace and liberty.

We duly achieved independence. Probably on December 19, we returned to the house at Fuller Road. The D.S.P. Mr. Majumdar (with my advancing age, I have forgotten his full name) came to my house accompanied by a young man. The young man used to drive a microbus for the killers. He said, "Yes, I had to drive them to this flat of this building to abduct someone, from 2 p.m. of December 12 till 10 a.m. December 16, a total of eleven times. I do not know who was the target but the house was locked the whole time." He surrendered to the police willingly and narrated the mass killing that took place in Mirpur [Boddhobhuni](#)†. With this information, some of the decaying corpses were identified—the remains of Santosh Bhattacharya* with his toothless face, Dr. Murtaza* who was blindfolded with a piece of a doll's cloth, Anwar Pasha* and Saidul Hassan wearing similar shawls. A mournful son identified the body of his father, Dr. Khan* who worked in the Research and Education Institute. The dismembered body of our dear Gias* was identified by the lungi and the shirt he was wearing.

Mr. Majumdar asked, "Their bodies are in the morgue. Would you like to go?"

I had to.

Gias used to come every night during curfew, Dr. Murtaza waved us goodbye when we left the house on December 12. Anwar Pasha had promised me ten years of refuge in his Murshidabad home. Why would I not go to see them one last time? All these memories drove me mad with grief and regret. Professor Rafiqul Islam, who was tortured and assaulted in prison, was with us during almost all of our ordeals. We rushed to the morgue to see our good friends one last time—Santosh Bhattacharya, the perfect gentleman; the child-like Anwar Pasha; Dr. Murtaza who was like a son to me and Gias who was like a brother.

But neither of us could look at them; the sense of loss and anguish was too much for us. They were soldiers killed in battle, they were martyrs. To show them respect, to honor them was our moral duty and responsibility. But we could not, we came running out of the morgue with trembling hearts and tearful eyes. We could not see their mutilated bodies. At the dawn of independence, at that moment, I had faced the most despicable, cruel, and gruesome acid-test and I had failed miserably. I feel as if I should be punished for failing to give those brave martyrs a final salute. What had never happened during the liberation struggle occurred in an independent Bangladesh. I felt terror—trembling with fear, I stormed out of there, almost as if I had lost my senses.

That horrifying moment of my life remains as a sign of shame on my forehead. There is no doubt that the moment will haunt me for the rest of my life. At least, I can confess my shortcomings to the readers. That was the most tormenting, painful, and horrendous moment of my life. I am a defeated soldier who is moving on from circle to circle unable to converge into the center. We achieved independence, but I could never be free from that tormenting memory.

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- *Adamjee Jute Mill* Adamjee Jute Mill was established in Narayanganj in 1951 by the Adamjee Group. It was one of the largest jute mills of the world. It was nationalized in 1972 and officially closed down in 2002.
 - *Ahmed Sofa Ahmed Sofa* (June 30, 1943 – July 28, 2001) is a wellknown Bangladeshi poet, novelist, writer, critic, translator, and intellectual.
 - *Amanullah Mohammad Asaduzzaman* (Shaheed Asad) A final year MA student of the Department of History, [University of Dhaka](#) †. He was killed on January 20, 1969 during the [1969 Mass Uprising](#) † when police opened fire on a procession brought out for the realization of the [11-Points Demand](#) †.
 - *A.N.M Munirzaman, Md. Abdul Muktedir, Santosh Chandra Bhattacharya, Anwar Pasha, Serajul Haque Khan, Gias Uddin Ahmed, Dr. Muhammad Murtaza* – refer to [University of Dhaka](#) † in the glossary.

Appendix

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(In alphabetical order)

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Glossary

[**Editors' Note:** The following terms were used in different articles of the book. These refer to places, people, organizations, historic events, etc. We expect that the entries in this glossary will create additional information for readers and help them appreciate the articles more. In most of the cases, the terms that appeared in more than one article are included in this glossary. A few terms added here appeared only once in the main text; but they are added in the glossary because they are cross-referenced by several other glossary posts. Terms that appear only once in the main text are mostly explained at the endnote section of each article.]

11 Point Demand, The (11 Point Program) A student movement demanding the autonomy of the then East Pakistan. After the *Agartala Conspiracy Case* was filed against *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* and other prominent leaders in 1968, students started protesting all over East Pakistan. Announcement of the eleven points in early 1969 was a part of the ongoing protest. The main demand was the immediate release of the Agartala Conspiracy Case prisoners. But the demands also covered a wide range of issues including education, economic, and political reforms; it included the issues raised during the *Six Point Movement* of 1966. 11 point demand became the essence of the student movement. Eventually, the movement turned into the *Mass Upsurge* of 1969.

1965 War The seventeen day war between India and Pakistan in 1965. The war started in August after soldiers in West Pakistan infiltrated a section of Kashmir controlled by India. The war ended in September. The war was mainly fought in Kashmir, but during that period, India launched air raids over East Pakistan.

Agartala Conspiracy Case, The Charges filed in January 1968 against 35 people including *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*, alleging them of conspiring with India to destabilize the unity of Pakistan. These allegations angered the population, and street protests followed. This eventually brought an end to the military dictatorship of *Ayub Khan* in 1969. Sheikh Mujib and others were freed from jail, political dialog resumed, and a general election was held in 1970. This case along with the ensuing protests was a key point in Bangladesh's struggle for independence.

Ahmad, Tajuddin Tajuddin Ahmad was a Bangladeshi statesman and freedom fighter. He led the *Mujibnagar Government*, the provisional government during the Bangladesh Liberation War to 1971, since *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* was arrested and transferred to West Pakistan at the start of the war. His efforts during the war to manage the wartime government, coordinate with the Indian government, keep track of the welfare of the refugees in India, raise an international concern for the genocide happening in the then East Pakistan made him the most important leader during the nine month war (March 26 - December 16, 1971).

Allied Forces (Mitro Bahini) The joint forces of the Indian Army and Bangladeshi freedom fighters. India did not intervene immediately when Pakistan launched *Operation Searchlight* in March 1971. After the formation of the *Mujibnagar Government* (Bangladesh government in exile) in April, 1971, the Indian Army got involved in the training and planning of the Bangladeshi guerrilla freedom fighters with the *Mukti Bahini*. Finally, on November 21, 1971, the Mitro Bahini was formed putting the Indian forces and Bangladeshi Mukti Bahini under the leadership of Lt. General Jagjit Singh Aurora.

All-Party Student Resistance Council Refer to *Chhatra Sangram Parishad, Sarbadaliya*.

Ansar Ansar is an Arabic word meaning the helpers. The Bangladesh Ansar (Ansar Bahini) is a disciplined force entrusted with law enforcement in the local government structure as a 'helper' to the regular police forces. It was formed as the 'East Pakistan Ansars' on February 12, 1948. Members of the Ansar Bahini actively participated during all the political protests in East Pakistan. Pakistan had disbanded the Ansars in 1971 for their support and participation in the Liberation War. A total of 9 officers and more than 600 Ansars and staff reportedly sacrificed their lives for

the cause of independence. After the Liberation War, Ansar Bahini was reactivated by the Government of Bangladesh. It exists now as Ansar and Village Defence Party (Ansar-VDP).

Awami League, Bangladesh One of the major political parties in Bangladesh, formerly known as the Awami Muslim League. It was founded in 1949 with a view to promoting Bengali nationalism. Awami League, led by *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*, won the Pakistan National Election in 1970 (160 seats out of 300), but were denied from forming the government by the martial law administrators.

Azaan (Adhan) Azaan is the call for Muslim prayer times, announced or broadcast using a loudspeaker from the minarets of mosques by a Muazzin. There are five official prayer times every day: beginning with ‘Fajr’ before dawn and ending with ‘Isha’ prayer in the evening.

Badr/Al-Badr Refer to *Perpetrators and Collaborators*.

Bangabhaban The Bangabhaban is the official residence and principal workplace of the President of Bangladesh.

Bangabandhu A *Bangla* word meaning ‘Friend of Bengal’. It is the title given to *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* by the people of Bangladesh. He is often referred to by this title only.

Bangali (Bengali) Principal ethnic group native to the region of Bengal, which is politically divided between Bangladesh and India. The Bengali language (বঙ্গ ভাষা *Bangla*) is associated with the Bengali people as the predominant native tongue. They are mostly concentrated in Bangladesh, and the states of West Bengal and Tripura in India.

Bangla (Bengali) The language of Bangladeshis and *Bangali*s in general. It is the state language of Bangladesh and one of the 22 listed languages in the Indian constitution. In India, it is the administrative language in the provinces of West Bengal and Tripura. With nearly 225 million total speakers, it is the seventh most spoken language in the world.

Bangla Academy Founded on December 3, 1955, it is the national academy for promoting the *Bangla* (Bengali) language in Bangladesh. It was the outcome of the *Language Movement* of 1952, and as such, a symbol of the movement and *Bangali* nationalism. The main office of the organization is located at the Burdwan House, once a part of the campus of the *University of Dhaka*. The largest national book-fair of the country, ‘Ekushey Boimela’ is held on the Bangla Academy premises throughout the month of February each year.

Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) BAU is a public university, established in August 18, 1961. The campus is situated on the western bank of the old Brahmaputra river, three kilometers south of the district town of Mymensingh.

Bangladesh Government in Exile Refer to *Mujibnagar Government*.

Bhai/Bhaijaan/Da/Daada Common forms of addressing brothers, cousins, acquaintances, someone who is like an elder brother. Literally translates to ‘brother’.

Bhasani, Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Refer to *National Awami Party*.

Bhutto, Zulfikar Ali Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was appointed foreign minister under the dictatorship of *Ayub Khan* in 1963. In 1967, he founded the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). In the 1970 general elections, PPP won 81 seats with a majority in West Pakistan. But the *Awami League* won most of the seats in East Pakistan—a total of 160 seats. Bhutto refused to let Awami League form the national government even though Awami League won an absolute majority in the legislature. Supportive of Pakistan Army’s actions during the Liberation War of Bangladesh, he tried to rally international support for the Pakistan Government. Later, he distanced himself from the army and was arrested on treason charges. After the independence of Bangladesh, he was appointed as the President of Pakistan and later was elected Prime Minister in 1973. He was removed after the 1977 coup by General ZiaUl-Haq. He was tried, convicted, and executed in 1979.

Bihari The natives of Bihar, an Indo-Aryan speaking Indian ethnic group originating from the present state of Bihar who have migrated to various parts of the Indian subcontinent. Throughout this book, narrators use this term to refer to the *Urdu* speaking natives of the then West Pakistan who lived in East Pakistan.

Birangana In Bangladesh’s Liberation War, rape was used as a weapon of war, as a mean of ethnic cleansing by the occupying Pakistan Army. Rape camps were established across the country.

Women of all ages (reportedly from eight to mid-sixties) were abducted and kept in the camps. They were raped, tortured, mutilated, and murdered. Approximately 300,000 women suffered these unspeakable tortures during the nine months of war. With deep respect and affection, they are called ‘Birangana’, the word literally translating to ‘heroine’ but it has a connotation similar to ‘martyress’. While many of them survived, their suffering is considered as horrific as any who have given their lives. The authors of ‘*Pahartali Massacre*’ and ‘*They were Our Mothers and Sisters*’ in this collection, narrate their personal accounts of witnessing the dead bodies and the rescue missions of some of the Biranganas.

Boddho-bhumi A *Bangla* word meaning a killing field. These are massacre grounds and mass graves where mass killings were carried out by the Pakistan Army. These places were in every major city, and also inside the university campuses. Innocent people, especially young men and intellectuals, were the victims. They would be arrested and brought to these places often after interrogation and torture in the concentration camps, and then brush fired sometimes blindfolded or from behind. Rayerbazar and Mirpur were two of the major killing fields that had mass graves in Dhaka city where thousands of intellectuals, students and innocent people were massacred. Many of the mass graves were discovered after the independence of Bangladesh. Renowned photographer Rashid Talukdar had taken images of such graves. The Martyred Intellectuals Memorial commemorates those martyred in the Rayerbazar Boddho-bhumi.

Burqa A veiled garment traditionally worn by Muslim women.

Cantonment In South Asian countries, the term cantonment is used to refer to a permanent military barrack.

Chhatra Sangram Parishad, Sarbadaliya (All-Party Student Resistance Council) The All-Party Student Resistance Council was formed by the main student organizations on January 5, 1969 with the objective of forging movement for the implementation of the demand for autonomy in the then East Pakistan and for putting an end to the autocratic rule of President *Ayub Khan*. The council declared its **11 Point Demand** in early 1969 and played eminent role in organizing and consolidating the **Mass Upsurge** of 1969.

Chhatra League The student wing of the *Awami League*.

Chowdhury, Munier A famous professor and a playwright. Munier Chowdhury taught for some time at B L College, Khulna (1947- 1950) and at Jagannath College, Dhaka (1950). He then joined the *University of Dhaka*. He actively participated in the **Language Movement** of 1952, and was imprisoned by the Pakistan government. After his release, he started teaching *Bangla* at the University of Dhaka, later becoming the Chairman of the Department and the Dean of the Faculty of Arts. On December 14, 1971, two days before the end of the Liberation War, he was abducted from his residence in Dhaka, tortured, and executed by the Pakistan Army and their collaborators.

Crack Platoon Refer to *Mukti Bahini*.

Da/Daada Refer to *Bhai/Bhaijaan*

Daily Ittefaq, **The** One of the most circulated newspapers in Bangladesh, printed by Ittefaq Group of Publications Limited. Its founders *Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani* and Yar Mohammad Khan were both actively involved in politics. The Daily Ittefaq had a vital role in ventilating people's sentiments about the contemporary issues. The paper was very critical about the widening disparity between the two wings of Pakistan, and the discriminating attitude of the central government towards East Pakistan. Founding editor Tofazzal Hossain Manik Miah's post editorial column 'Rajnaitik Mancha' (*Political Platform*) became popular in East Pakistan. Tofazzal Hossain was imprisoned several times. The Ittefaq supported the **Six Point Movement** of *Awami League* during the mid-1960s and helped publish its ideas. President *Ayub Khan* censored its publication from June 17 to July 11, 1966, and then again from July 17, 1966 to February 9, 1969.

The Ittefaq office was burnt down and completely demolished on March 25, 1971 by the Pakistani Army as part of **Operation Searchlight**. After two or three months, the newspaper started publication under the surveillance of the Pakistan government. *Serajuddin Hossain*, As the News Editor of the Daily Ittefaq, he wrote political columns against *Ayub Khan* from 1969 to 1971, thereby playing an important role in the **Mass Upsurge of 1969** through the newspaper. He was appointed as the Executive Editor of the Daily Ittefaq in 1970. On the night of December 10, 1971, a number of Pakistani soldiers and their collaborators abducted him from his residence. He never returned, nor was his body ever found.

D.C. Deputy Commissioner, a government official from the Ministry of Public Administration. A D.C. is the executive head of the District, an administrative sub-unit of a Division.

December 14, Martyred Intellectuals Day Two days prior to the independence of Bangladesh, a planned killing of the *Bangali* intellectuals, educators, journalists, writers, physicians, engineers, lawyers, artists, philosophers, and political thinkers was executed under the directive and guidance of the Pakistan Army. On December 14, 1971, sensing an imminent defeat, the Pakistani occupation forces and their collaborators — the *Razakar*s, *Al-Badr*s, etc.,—abducted and killed prominent Bangali intellectuals and professionals in what is considered a blueprint to cripple a newborn country intellectually. More than a thousand eminent professionals were abducted, blindfolded, taken to torture camps, and killed. Their bodies were dumped in the *Boddhobhumi* in Rayerbazar, Mirpur, and other killing grounds in Dhaka and other major cities. Martyred Intellectuals Day (Shaheed Buddhijibi Dibosh) is observed on December 14 to commemorate those intellectuals who were killed by Pakistani Army and their collaborators at the end of the 1971 Liberation War.

December 16, Victory day The occupying Pakistan Army in Bangladesh, led by Lt. Gen. A. K. Niazi surrendered to the *Allied Forces*, led by Lt. Gen. J. S. Aurora on December 16, 1971 at the **Ramma Racecourse Maidan** (present day Suhrawardy Udyan, a large park) in Dhaka. The surrender of the Pakistani forces marked the end of the nine month-long (March 26 - December 16, 1971) Liberation War of Bangladesh. December 16 is celebrated as the **Victory Day**.

Dev, Govinda Chandra Refer to *Jagannath Hall*.

Dhaka University Central Student Union (DUCSU) The student governance body which represents all students in the *University of Dhaka* . Its primary responsibilities include research, education, and actions related to campus and academic issues, sponsoring programs of interest and benefit to students, and participation in Dhaka University policy making and student services. DUCSU played a crucial role in the political protests and agitations throughout 1948 to 1971.

Dhanmondi No. 32 The residence of *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* . It was considered the hub of all activities in 1971. Sheikh Mujib was arrested from his residence on March 25, 1971. He was also assassinated there in 1975. It is now the *Bangabandhu* Memorial Museum.

Dom The Dom community works in the hospital morgues, at the undertakers, and similar places. They are mostly from the lowest Hindu castes similar to the untouchable caste and are involved in professions such as sweepers, janitors, etc. The morning following *Operation Searchlight* and later in many torture camps throughout 1971, they were tasked with disposing of the corpses and dumping them in the mass graves by the occupying Pakistani Army and their collaborators.

East Bengal Regiment An infantry regiment of the Bangladesh Army. Between 1948 and 1965, a total of eight battalions were raised, with the 5th, 6th, and 7th in West Pakistan and the rest in East Pakistan. In March 1971, the five battalions in East Pakistan mutinied and formed the core of the liberation forces *Mukti Bahini*. Notable commanders of the regiment were General *M.A.G. Osmani*, Major General Khaled Mosharraf, and Lieutenant General *Ziaur Rahman* . Today, The East Bengal Regiment is made up of around 58 battalions.

EPCAF Refer to *Perpetrators and Collaborators*.

EPR (East Pakistan Rifles) A paramilitary force primarily responsible for the border security of Bangladesh operating under the Ministry of Home Affairs. It was renamed Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) after the liberation of the country and now it is known as the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). The *Bangali* soldiers of the EPR were among the first to mutiny against the Pakistan Army on March 26, 1971. According to reports, a total of 817 EPR members were killed during the Liberation War.

February 21 (Language Movement of 1952) Popularly known as ‘Ekushey February’, a national day of Bangladesh to commemorate the protests and sacrifices to protect *Bangla* (Bengali) as a national language during the Bengali Language Movement of 1952. The then East Pakistan had a larger population than West Pakistan and naturally the majority of the Pakistani citizens spoke in Bangla. When the Pakistani government declared *Urdu* as the national language and its exclusive use in the media and in schools around 1947-48, opposition and protests immediately arose in East Pakistan. The protests took a severe turn on February 21, 1952, when several students particularly from the *University of Dhaka* and Dhaka Medical College were killed by the Pakistani police during protests. UNESCO announced the day as the International Mother Language Day in 1999. Now, it is celebrated worldwide to promote awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.

Gandhi, Indira The Prime Minister of India during 1971. Indira Gandhi and the then Indian government were stalwart supporters of Bangladesh’s struggle for freedom. India gave shelter to over 10 million refugees from Bangladesh, sought support from the international arena to prevent the genocide in then East Pakistan, and helped set up training camps for the freedom fighters (the *Mukti Bahini*). India also served as the center of the Bangladesh Government in exile, and supported the most prominent media outlet of the Bangladesh Government, a radio station named the *Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra* . Indira Gandhi herself toured the world to bring awareness to the atrocities in East Pakistan and to draw attention to the terrible plight of the Bangladeshi refugees. On December 3, Pakistan declared war on India and that led to the formation of the *Allied Forces (Mitro Bahini)* with India joining the war. The Government of Bangladesh awarded Indira Gandhi its highest state award, the Bangladesh Freedom Honor, posthumously in 2011.

Guhathakurta, Jyotirmoy Refer to *Jagannath Hall*.

Grand Trunk Road One of South Asia’s oldest and longest major roads. For more than two millennia, it has linked the eastern and western regions of the Indian subcontinent, running from Chittagong, Bangladesh across north India into Peshawar in Pakistan, up to Kabul, Afghanistan. The pre-cursor to the modern road was built in the 16th century.

Havildar Non-Commissioned Officers’ Rank in Pakistan Army, (equivalent rank to Sergeant).

Imam, Jahanara Jahanara Imam was a literary figure and staunch advocate for war-crime trials. She lost her husband and eldest son during the Liberation War. Mrs. Imam wrote her heart-wrenching story in her famous memoir ‘*Ekattorer Dinguli*’ (Of Blood and Fire) and spent her years tirelessly working to raise awareness about the 1971 genocide. She championed a movement called ‘*Gana Adalat*’ (*Peoples’ Tribunal*) in the early 90s to bring the war criminals and chief *perpetrators* (the *Razakar* s, *Al-Badr* s, *Peace Committee members* , etc.,) of the 1971 genocide to face trial for their heinous crimes. She died in 1994, but the movement went on and culminated in the perpetrators facing justice after over 40 years of independence. She is affectionately called ‘*Shaheed Janani*’ (Mother of Martyrs).

Iqbal Hall Now called Sergeant Zahurul Haq Hall, it is one of the dormitories for the male students of the *University of Dhaka* . During *Operation Searchlight* of March 25, 1971 midnight, the Pakistani Army convoy including 18 and 32 *Punjab* , 22 *Baluch* regiments and several battalions armed with heavy weapons encircled Dhaka University from the east, south and north. The Pakistan Army attacked mainly the Iqbal Hall, *Jagannath Hall*, and Liaquat Hall, which were known as centers of strength of Chhatra League, the student wing of

Awami League .

Jagannath Hall One of the three original residential halls (dormitories) that date from when the *University of Dhaka* was founded in 1921. The Hall is a complex of buildings including residences, meeting rooms, dining rooms, a prayer hall, gardens, and sporting facilities. Jagannath Hall, which had been a residence for many of the non-Muslim students of the university, suffered the brutal hostility of the Pakistan Army during the massacre of **March 25**, 1971.

Professor Govinda Chandra Dev, Prof. Dev was the former Provost of Jagannath Hall. He was assassinated at his university residence by the Pakistan Army during **Operation Searchlight** of March 25, 1971. Dr. Govinda Chandra Dev, or G. C. Dev as he was popularly known, was a leading intellectual and a Professor of Philosophy at the *University of Dhaka*. Prof. Dev was elected the general secretary of Pakistan Philosophical Congress in the 1960s and held the post till his death in 1971.

Dr. Jyotirmoy Guhathakurta, Dr. Guhathakurta was the Provost of Jagannath Hall in 1971. He was shot on the night of March 25, 1971 by the Pakistani Army, just outside the university building where he lived. He had joined *University of Dhaka* in 1949 as a Lecturer of English. He was promoted to Reader (equivalent to a Professor in the USA) after his doctorate from UK, a position he held till his death. He died in the hospital with serious wound and very little medical attention on March 30, 1971.

Jamaat-e-Islami (Jamaat) The political party Jamaat-e-Islami was originally founded in 1941 with Maulana Maududi as its 'ameer' (Arabic, meaning Chairman) advocating for incorporating Islamic ideology into the state system. After the 1947 partition of India, a Jamaat-e-Islami wing was formed in the then East Pakistan. During the Liberation War of 1971, Jamaat-e-Islami was a staunch supporter of the Pakistan military force and aided them along with the collaborators *Razakars* and *Al-Badr*s. The leadership of the party participated and actively led acts of genocide during the war. After liberation, Jamaat was banned from politics and its top leaders left the country. However, by the late 70s, Jamaat was once more active in Bangladesh. International Crimes Tribunal of Bangladesh, established in 2010, tried and punished top leaders of Jamaat for Genocide and Crimes against Humanity.

Jawan A junior soldier, an infantryman.

'Joy Bangla' The universal battle cry during the liberation movement. 'Joy Bangla' literally translates to 'Victory for Bangla(desh)'. This chant highlighted the secular nature of the struggle and was a clear separation of previous chants which were somehow inclined to various religions.

K-Force Refer to *Mukti bahini*.

Kaiser, Shahidullah Shahidullah Kaiser was a Bangladeshi novelist and journalist. In 1952, he actively participated in the *Language Movement*. Kaiser joined as an associate editor of The Daily Sangbad, where he worked for the rest of his life. During the Liberation War, he collected medicine and food and delivered those to designated posts in Dhaka city (one such post was the home of Begum *Sufia Kamal*), from where the freedom fighters picked those up for their training outposts. Kaiser was rounded up on **December 14, 1971** by the Pakistan Army and its local collaborators who initiated a plan for killing the leading *Bangali* intellectuals. As his body was never found and he never returned himself, it is assumed that he was executed along with other intellectuals. His brother *Zahir Raihan*, a notable film-maker, also disappeared just several weeks later, right after liberation on December 30, 1971 while searching for him.

Kalurghat Kalurghat is located several miles north of the port city of Chittagong in Bangladesh. A bridge near Kalurghat on The Karnaphuli River connects Chittagong city with the southern parts of the district. From this location, the Declaration of Independence of Bangladesh was announced on **March 26**, 1971. The announcements were made using a makeshift radio transmitter. The declarations were made on behalf of *Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*.

Kamal, Sufia Begum Sufia Kamal was a poet and political activist. Kamal was an influential cultural icon in the Bengali nationalist movement of the 1950s and 60s and an important civil society leader in independent Bangladesh. During 1971, she actively but secretly helped freedom fighters of the Liberation War.

Khan, Abdul Monem Abdul Monem Khan was the Governor of East Pakistan from October, 1962 to March, 1969. He was a steadfast supporter of *Ayub Khan* and was involved in the suppression of East Pakistan's demands and movements during his time as Governor, most notably the *Six Point Movement* and the 1969 *Mass Upsurge*. He was killed by *Mukti Bahini* guerrillas on October 13, 1971.

Khan, Ayub Field Marshal (Five Star General) Mohammad Ayub Khan was the first native Chief of Staff of Pakistan (appointed 1951). He was appointed as Martial Law Administrator in 1958. Two weeks later, he replaced President Iskander Mirza in a bloodless coup. He led a highly centralized government and during his rule the disparity between East and West Pakistan grew even more. In 1965, he was elected president in a controversial election against Fatima Jinnah. In response to fading popularity, growing criticism, and unrest in East Pakistan stemming from the *Six Point Movement* in 1966 and the *Mass Upsurge* in 1969, he resigned in 1969 and handed over power to the army chief General *Yahya Khan* on 24 March, 1969.

Khan, Tikka General Tikka Khan was a Four Star General in the Pakistan Army. He was the, Martial Law Administrator of East Pakistan and later the Governor of East Pakistan. He took over the Eastern Command on March 7, 1971. He was ruthless and brutal in the execution of *Operation Searchlight* and the ensuing genocide that was perpetrated by the Pakistan Army and its collaborators. His actions earned him the title 'Butcher of Bengal'. Before his actions in 1971, he had already gained notoriety for his suppression of Baluchistan and got the nickname 'Butcher of Baluchistan'.

Khan, Yahya Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan was a Four Star General of the Pakistan Army. He was the third President of Pakistan. He was appointed as the Pakistan Army's Commander-in-Chief in 1966 and succeeded **Ayub Khan** as President in 1969. He declared martial law soon after and refused to allow **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman** and **Awami League** the opportunity to form a government after their landslide victory in the 1970 elections. On March 1, 1971 he indefinitely postponed the session of the National Assembly convened earlier. Consequently, as a protest, non-cooperation movement started in the whole of East Pakistan led by **Awami League** chief **Sheikh Mujib**. To face the situation, Yahya Khan came to Dhaka and had dialogue with Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (March 16-24, 1971) and **Bhutto**. While the dialogues continued, preparation for the genocide of March 25 night, **Operation Searchlight** was carried out. The genocide ultimately led to ignite the Liberation War of Bangladesh. After the defeat in the war, Yahya Khan stepped down as President and Army Chief of Pakistan. He was stripped of his decorations and put under house arrest by the new President **Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto**.

Language Movement Refer to **February 21**.

Lungi A traditional garment worn waist-down (similar to a long skirt). It is particularly popular in regions where the heat and humidity create an unpleasant climate for trousers. Usually worn by men in Bangladesh, it can be tied or fastened in various ways.

March 7 Speech, 1971 On March 7, 1971, **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman** gave a speech at the **Ramma Racecourse** in Dhaka. Awami League won the 1970's election with majority. But the National Assembly scheduled on March 3, 1971 was cancelled by President General **Yahya Khan**. Under the increasing protests in the then East Pakistan, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman addressed the nation at the **Ramma Racecourse**, Dhaka. Over two million people gathered to hear the speech which lasted nearly 19 minutes. His address ended with, "Since we have given blood for our cause so many times, we will give more of it. But, Insha'Allah, we will free the people of this land! The struggle this time is for emancipation! The struggle this time is for independence! **Joy Bangla**!" This motivational address inspired the people of Bangladesh for the Liberation War.

March 25, 1971 Refer to **Operation Searchlight**.

March 26, Independence Day March 26 commemorates Bangladesh's Declaration of Independence from Pakistan. After the genocide of March 25, 1971 night (**Operation Searchlight**), The Declaration of Independence was broadcast on March 26, 1971 through radio transmissions from **Kalurghat**. The **Mujibnagar Government** (Bangladesh Government in Exile) was formed on April 10, 1971.

Mahmud, Altaf Bangladeshi composer and cultural activist. He was a part of the **Language Movement** in 1952 and composed the tune of the most iconic song about that movement. During the Liberation War, he was part of the group of musicians of **Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra** and greatly inspired the freedom fighters. In addition, he supported the freedom fighters by providing them food and money. He was abducted and killed by the Pakistan Army on August 30, 1971.

Mass Upsurge of 1969 The Mass Upsurge of 1969 started with the student unrest of 1968 against the tyrannical rule of **Ayub Khan**, then President of Pakistan. The movement soon engulfed the whole of then East Pakistan. Peasants, artisans, workers joined the movement en masse. Due to continuous exaction of undue demands, the labouring class of the industrial belts and low and medium income groups soon turned the movement into a struggle for economic emancipation. This became the greatest mass awakening since the creation of Pakistan.

Melaghar (Mukti Bahini camp) Melaghar camp was a training camp for freedom fighters during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. In a cabinet meeting of the **Mujibnagar government**, held on July 11, 1971, Bangladesh forces were divided into eleven **sectors**. Melaghar, near Agartala, India, was the headquarters of Sector 2.

Mitro Bahini Refer to **Allied Forces**

M. P. Hostel Residential building in Dhaka for the Members of the Parliament (MPs).

Mujib/Mujibur Refer to **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**.

Mujibnagar Government (Bangladesh Government in Exile) The interim government of Bangladesh during the Liberation War. The Mujibnagar Government was established on April 10, 1971 to organize and conduct the Liberation War. **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman** was declared as President, while **Tajuddin Ahmad** was appointed the Prime Minister. Syed Nazrul Islam was appointed as the Vice President and interim President. The other cabinet members of the government at its inauguration were Khondokar Mostaq Ahmed, M. Mansur Ali, and A. H. M. Qamaruzzaman. The government took oath at Baidyanathatala in Meherpur district (on the border with India) on April 17, 1971 and its capital in exile was set in Kolkata, West Bengal in India. The name of Baidyanathatala was converted to Mujibnagar (Town of Mujib). Throughout the Liberation War, the Mujibnagar Government recruited and trained the freedom fighters to create and operate the **Mukti Bahini**, maintained and supported the large number of refugee camps set up in India for the Bangladeshis fleeing their homeland. Emissaries and advocates for the people of Bangladesh were sent to different countries to find aid for the large number of refugees as well as drumming up support for an independent Bangladesh.

'Mukti' The **Mukti Bahini** and the freedom fighters of the Mukti Bahini were often referred to as 'Mukti' by the Pakistan Army.

Mukti Bahini Although armed resistance against the Pakistani Army started from March, 1971, a formal structure of the Bangladeshi Forces (Mukti Bahini) was determined at the Sector Commander's Conference

in July. **Tajuddin Ahmad**, head of the provisional government during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971, was present. **M. A. G. Osmani**, a retired Colonel at that time, was promoted as a General and was reinstated on active duty as the Commander-in-Chief of all Bangladesh Forces. The war zone was divided into 11 **Sectors** and formal commanders of the sectors were appointed. Another decision was to form three brigades with members of the **East Bengal Regiment**. These are called K-Force, S-Force, and Z-Force.

K-Force, Led by Major Khaled Mosharraf. It was created with the 4th, 9th, and 10th East Bengal Regiment. These three regiments principally constituted Sector 2.

S-Force, Led by Major K. M. Shafiullah. It was created in October 1971 with the 2nd and 11th East Bengal Regiment. These three regiments principally constituted Sector 3.

Z-Force, Led by Major **Ziaur Rahman**. It was created with the 1st, 3rd, and 8th East Bengal Regiment. These three regiments principally constituted Sector 11.

Crack Platoon, A commando group that carried out guerrilla operations in the capital city of Dhaka from June, 1971 to the end of the Liberation War.

Muktijoddha Freedom fighters of the **Mukti Bahini**.

Muslim League Political party established in December 1906, initially led by Aga Khan. Muslim League, under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, was instrumental in creating public opinion in favor of Muslim nationalism and finally in achieving Pakistan in 1947.

Naik Army rank equivalent to a Corporal.

National Awami Party National Awami Party (NAP) is a leftist political party formed in 1957 by Maulana (Mowlana) Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani and Yar Mohammad Khan. This was formed from several leftist factions after Bhasani had a fallout with **Awami League**, which he founded and was the first President.

Maulana (Mowlana) Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani, Maulana Bhasani was a political leader of India, East Pakistan, and later Bangladesh. He was a populist leader, fighting for the causes of the poor and the oppressed. He was born in 1880. In 1919, he participated in the Non-Cooperation Movement as a member of the Indian National Congress. He later was a member of the **Muslim League** and became a major promoter of the concept of Pakistan as a separate nation. After the separation of India and Pakistan in 1947, he founded the East Pakistan Awami Muslim League (later turned into Awami League) in 1949. He was instrumental in the **Language Movement** by forming the 'All Party Language Movement Committee' on January 31, 1952.

In 1954, he played a pivotal role in forging the alliance 'United Front' with A.K. Fazlul Huq, Huseyn Suhrawardy, and **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**. In the late 60s, he played a prominent role in the protests against the military dictatorship, the release of the prisoners of the **Agartala Conspiracy Case**, and the **Mass Uprising** of 1969. He boycotted the elections of 1970 out of mistrust of the Pakistan Government and openly called for separation.

New Market One of the most prominent and historic shopping malls in Dhaka. Built in 1952, it quickly became one of the most popular spots for both shopping and entertainment. Its proximity to the **University of Dhaka** campus made it a target for the Pakistan Army on the night of **March 25**.

Old Dhaka (Puran Dhaka) The old part of Dhaka city.

Operation Searchlight (March 25, 1971) Name of the ruthless and brutal military operation undertaken by the Pakistan Army on the night of March 25, 1971 in order to curb the movement of the **Bangali**s against the autocratic rule of the Pakistani martial law administrators. The purpose of this operation was to arrest **Sheikh Mujibur Rahman**, and kill political leaders, students, cultural activists, intellectuals, the East Pakistan police, and anybody who joined in the protests. The operation started in the middle of the night, simultaneously across all of the then East Pakistan. It is estimated that around 50,000 people were killed on that one night.

Osmani, General Muhammad Ataul Gani Muhammad Ataul Gani Osmani, also known as Bangabir (the Hero of Bengal), was a Bangali Four Star General who was the Commander-in-Chief of the **Mukti Bahini** during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. Osmani's career spanned five decades, beginning with service in the British Indian Army in 1939. He fought in Burma (now Myanmar) during World War II; later, he served in the Pakistan Army until 1967. Osmani was appointed head of the Bengali armed resistance in 1971 by the Provisional Government of Bangladesh, and he is regarded as the founder of the Bangladesh Armed Forces. General Osmani retired in 1972.

Panjabi A long shirt worn usually by Muslim males, traditional to the region of Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. It is typically worn with a pajama.

Pathan Pathan is a synonym commonly used in South Asia to refer to the Pashtun people, alternatively called ethnic Afghans. They are the largest ethnic group in Afghanistan and the second largest ethnic group in Pakistan.

Peace Committee Refer to *Perpetrators and Collaborators*.

Perpetrators and Collaborators A number of Bangali people turned against their own people and chose to collaborate with the West Pakistani Armed Forces during the Liberation War of Bangladesh. They formed several paramilitary forces and committed mass atrocities alongside the Pakistani military forces. These forces include the Razakar, Peace Committee, Al-Badr (Badr), and Al-Shams. Several leaders of these forces were tried in the International Crimes Tribunal after over forty years of the Liberation War for the war crimes they committed against humanity.

Peace Committee , East Pakistan Central Peace Committee also known as the Nagorik Shanti Committee (Citizen's Peace Committee), or more commonly Shanti Committee (Peace Committee), was one of several committees formed in East Pakistan in 1971 by the Pakistan Army to aid its efforts in crushing the rebellion for Bangladesh independence. Ghulam Azam, as a leader of *Jamaat-e-Islami* , led the formation of the Peace Committee. The committee recruited Razakars.

Razakar , Razakar is an Urdu word, literally meaning 'volunteer'. The East Pakistan Razakar Ordinance was promulgated on June 1, 1971 by the Governor of East Pakistan, Lieutenant General *Tikka Khan* . The Ordinance stipulated the creation of a voluntary force to be trained and equipped by the Provincial Government to suppress the rebellion of people who wanted independence for the region. Since the 1971 war, it has become a pejorative term in Bangladesh due to the many suspected atrocities which the Razakars committed and facilitated during the war. The Razakar force was composed of mostly pro-Pakistan Bengalis and Urdu-speaking migrants who lived in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) at the time.

Al-Badr , Al-Badr was an auxiliary force and secret killing squad, composed of the leading members of the student wing of Jamaat-e-Islami to fight out and resist the *Mukti Bahini* . The organization worked as the local guides for Pakistan Army supporting the troops by providing logistics and information. It arrested suspects and transported them to interrogation centres. It carried out looting, rape, and violence on the civilian population. On December 12, 1971, the Al-Badr leadership executed the blueprint for killing the intellectuals (*refer to December 14*) .

Al-Shams , Al-Shams was another auxiliary force, mostly recruited from public schools and madrasas (religious schools). Their tactics were terrorism and political killings.

EPCAF , East Pakistan Civil Armed Force was a paramilitary force with black uniform. It was formed by civilians trained in West Pakistan and brought to East Pakistan to help the Pakistan Army. Unlike other forces listed here, this was formed by people from West Pakistan.

Pervin, Selina Journalist and poet. She is one of the thousands of intellectual martyrs killed by the *Al-Badr* on December 14, at the scaffold of Rayerbazar.

Punjab A geographical and cultural region in the northern part of South Asia, comprising areas of eastern Pakistan and northern India.

Punjabi A resident of Punjab; also the language spoken by the residents of Punjab. The Pakistan Army soldiers were often commonly referred to as Punjabi soldiers by the Bengali population.

Rabbee, Dr. Mohammed Fazle Dr. Rabbee was a renowned cardiologist and a published medical researcher. He was the Joint Professor of Cardiology and Internal Medicine at Dhaka Medical College and Hospital. His wife Jahan Ara Rabbee was also a medical doctor. Rabbee was brutally murdered in December of 1971 (*refer to December 14*).

Racecourse Field, Ramna Racecourse Ramna Racecourse is a ground that was once used for legal horse racing on Sundays. It is currently known as Suhrawardy Udyan—a large park in the midst of Dhaka city. *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* gave his *March 7 Speech* at this ground. This is also the place where the Pakistani forces surrendered on December 16, 1971, marking the end of the Liberation War.

Rahman , Sheikh Mujibur (Sheikh Mujib or Mujib) Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was the most prominent leader of the *Awami League* . He is popularly known as the *Bangabandhu* (Friend of Bengal). He is credited as the central figure in Bangladesh's liberation movement and is hailed as the founding father of Bangladesh. Rahman led the Awami League to win the election of Pakistan in 1970. When the National Assembly scheduled on March 3, 1971 was cancelled, and civil disobedience erupted across East Pakistan, Rahman announced the Bangladeshi struggle for independence during a landmark speech on *March 7, 1971* . On the night of March 25, 1971, the Pakistan Army responded to the mass protests with *Operation Searchlight* , in which Prime Minister-elect Rahman was arrested and flown to solitary confinement in West Pakistan. Rahman became the Prime Minister of Bangladesh under a parliamentary system adopted by the new country after liberation. In August 1975, he and most of his family were assassinated by renegade army officers during a coup. His daughter Sheikh Hasina Wajed is the current Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

Raihan, Zahir Notable film-maker, author Zahir Raihan disappeared (considered murdered) on December 30, 1971 just a few weeks after the liberation while searching for his brother *Shahidullah Kaiser*.

Rahman, Ziaur Ziaur Rahman was an army Major in 1971, who declared the Independence of Bangladesh on behalf of *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* , Zia was a *Sector* Commander initially, and later the Brigade Commander of *Z-Force* during the war. Zia was awarded the high gallantry award of 'Bir Uttam' in 1972 for his wartime services. After the war, Zia became a brigade commander, and later the Deputy Chief of the Bangladesh Army. He served as the 7th President of Bangladesh from 1977 after a series of events resulted in Zia gaining de facto power as head of the government. As President, Zia founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). Domestically, Zia faced as many as twenty-one coup

attempts until his assassination in 1981. His wife, Begum Khaleda Zia, is the current leader of BNP and served several terms as the Prime Minister of Bangladesh.

Rajarbagh Police Lines Police Barracks in Rajarbagh area of Dhaka city.

Razakar Refer to *Perpetrators and Collaborators*.

Sector(s) Refer to *Mukti bahini*.

Sepoy An infantry private.

S-Force Refer to *Mukti bahini*.

Shaheed Minar Shaheed Minar is a national monument in Dhaka, Bangladesh, established to commemorate the martyrs of the 1952 *Language Movement*.

Sheikh/ Sheikh Mujib Refer to *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman*.

Six Point Movement The Six Point Movement was started by *Sheikh Mujibur Rahman* in 1966. Its main theme was to demand greater autonomy for East Pakistan and to reduce the preferential treatment of West Pakistan in all sectors.

Students' Union, Bangladesh Bangladesh Students' Union (BSU) is a left-leaning political organization in Bangladesh. It was established on April 26, 1952. Many BSU members actively participated in the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

Subedar Junior Commissioned Officer (JCO) ranks in Pakistan Army, (equivalent rank to British Lieutenant). Subedar Major (infantry and other arms) is a rank above Subedar.

Suhrawardy Udyan Refer to *Racecourse Field*.

Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra Meaning 'Free Bengal Radio Center', it was the radio broadcasting center of Bengali nationalist forces during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. This station played a vital role in the liberation struggle, broadcasting the Declaration of Independence (refer to *March 26, 1971*) and boosting mental strength and spirit of Bangladeshis during the war.

University of Dhaka, The (Dhaka University) The oldest and the largest university in Bangladesh, established in 1921. The teachers and students of the university were always in the forefront of the political movements including the *Language Movement* of 1952, the *Mass Uprising* of 1969, and the Liberation War of 1971. The student halls of residence at the University were particularly raided and numerous students residing there were brutally killed and maimed during the beginning of the war. Some of the martyred teachers of the University of Dhaka were mentioned in some narratives. They are:

Dev, Govinda Chandra, Refer to *Jagannath Hall*.

Guhathakurta, Jyotirmoy, Refer to *Jagannath Hall*.

Muniruzzaman, A.N.M., Dr. Moniruzzaman joined the Department of Statistics as a Lecturer in 1948. He was promoted to Reader (equivalent to a Professor in the USA) in 1961 and was the departmental head from 1967 to 1971. On the night of March 25, 1971, he was shot dead by the Pakistan Army along with his son and two other members of his family on the stairwell of their residential building.

Muktadir, Md. Abdul, Dr. Muktadir began his career as a Lecturer of Geology at Dhaka University in 1964. He was abducted from his home by the Pakistani military on the night of March 25, 1971 and his body was found at Jahurul Huq Hall (then *Iqbal Hall*).

Bhattacharya, Santosh Chandra, Dr. Bhattacharya started his academic career as a Lecturer in the Jagannath College in 1939 and then joined the Department of History in the University of Dhaka as a Senior Lecturer in 1949. He was blindfolded and abducted from his house on **December 14, 1971**. His body was recovered from the Mirpur *Boddho-bhumi*.

Pasha, Anwar, Anwar Pasha was a *Bangali* author and novelist. He wrote short stories, novels, essays, and poems. Along with Muhammad Abdul Hai, he edited and published four medieval *Bangla* epics. He joined the Department of Bengali, University of Dhaka in 1966. Shortly before the liberation, he was picked up from his university apartment, taken to Mirpur, and killed brutally along with other intellectuals.

Khan, Serajul Haque, Dr. Khan was an educator and intellectual. He joined the Institute of Education Research, University of Dhaka as a Senior Lecturer in 1967. On December 14, 1971, he was abducted by the activists of *Al-Badr* from his residence at the university Staff Quarters. His dead body was later recovered from the Mirpur *Boddho-bhumi*.

Ahmed, Gias Uddin, Dr. Ahmed was a teacher at the Department of History, University of Dhaka. He was dragged out from Mohsin Hall (a student dormitory of the university) on December 13, 1971, and later killed by the Pakistani Army and their collaborators.

Murtaza, Muhammad, Muhammad Murtaza was a Medical Officer of University of Dhaka. During the Liberation War, he stayed behind in Dhaka and secretly provided treatment and medication to the injured *Mukti Bahini* operating within the city. He was picked up by a group of *Al-Badr*s on December 14, 1971, from his residence.

In recognition of the distinguished leadership role of the university during the Liberation War of 1971 and its contribution to education and research in Bangladesh, the University of Dhaka was awarded the Independence Day Award in the category of education in 2011.

University of Rajshahi , The It is one of the largest public universities of Bangladesh; it was established in 1953. The university played a pioneering role in the *Mass Upsurge* of 1969 and in the Liberation War of 1971. Dr. Shamsuzzoha, then Proctor and Assistant Professor of Chemistry embraced martyrdom on February 18, 1969 when Pakistani military opened fire of him on the main gate premises when he tried to prevent them from shooting student demonstrators following *the 11 Point Demand* . He is the first martyred intellectual of the country.

During the Liberation War of 1971, the university campus was used as a base and a torture camp by the Pakistan Army. Some of the martyred teachers of the University of Rajshahi were mentioned in some narratives. They are:

Rahman, Habibur, Dr. Rahman was a mathematician and a renowned academic. On April 15, the Pakistani Army with their collaborators picked him up from his campus residence. He never returned.

Samaddar, Sukharanjan, Dr. Samaddar was an Associate Professor of Sanskrit. He was dragged out of his campus home by the Pakistani Army and then taken away. His grave is in the university's Central Library premises.

Some of the teachers of the University of Rajshahi who were tortured by the Pakistan Army were mentioned in some narratives. They are:

Rahman, Mujibar, Dr. Rahman joined the Department of Mathematics as a Senior Lecturer in 1967. He sent an official protest letter to the University authority on April 10, 1971. As a result, he was arrested and tortured barbarously by the Pakistani Army.

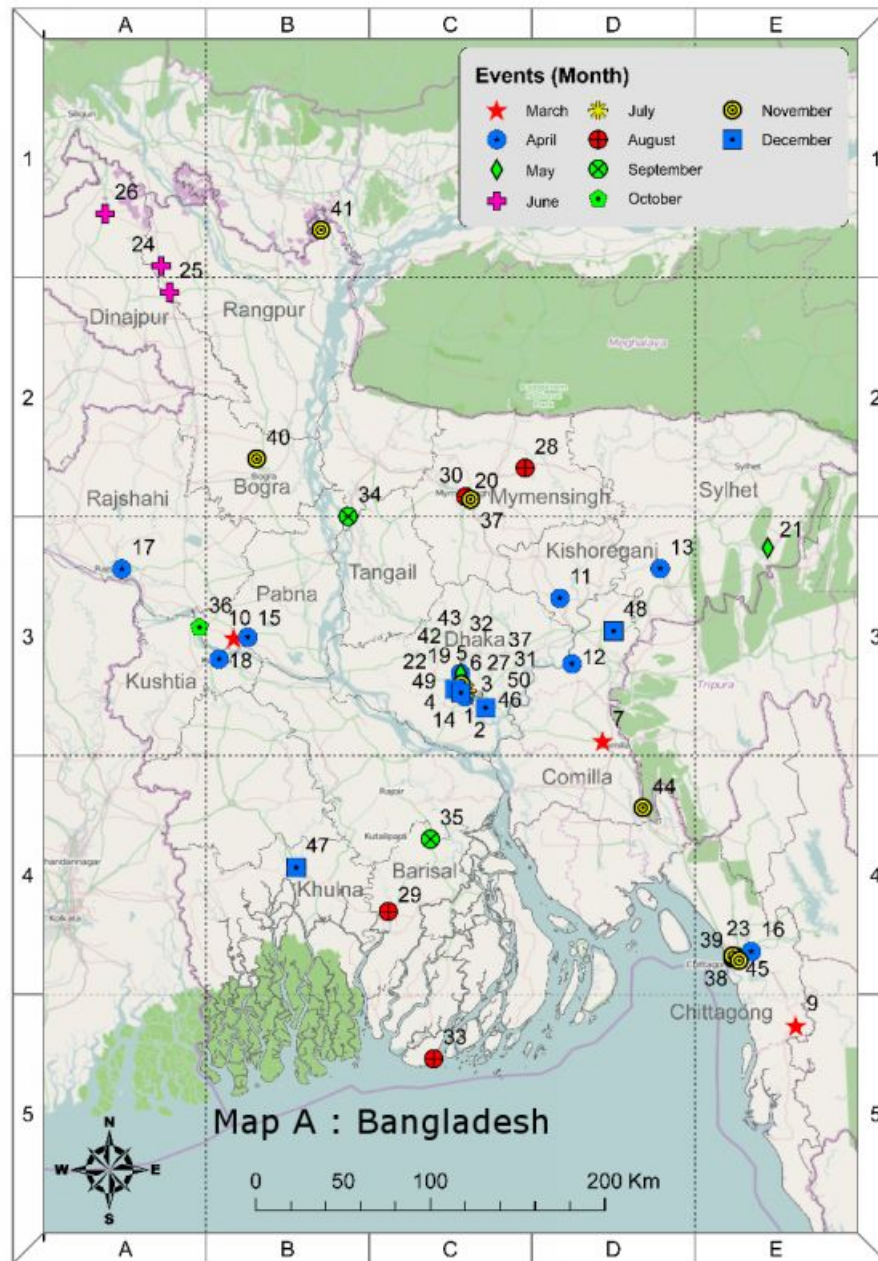
Kamal, Abu Hena Mustafa , Dr. Kamal was a poet, educator, essayist, and composer. He was a Reader (equivalent to a Professor) in the Department of Bengali, University of Rajshahi. He was brutally tortured by the Pakistani Army. He was a professor at the *University of Dhaka* in his later career and served as the Director General of the *Bangla Academy* till his death on September 23, 1989.

The Pakistani forces retreated from the University of Rajshahi on December 18, 1971. In 1972, the uthority established *Shahid Smriti Sangrahashala*, which is the first museum of the country on the Liberation War of Bangladesh.

Urdu Urdu is the National language of Pakistan.

Z-Force Refer to *Mukti bahini* .

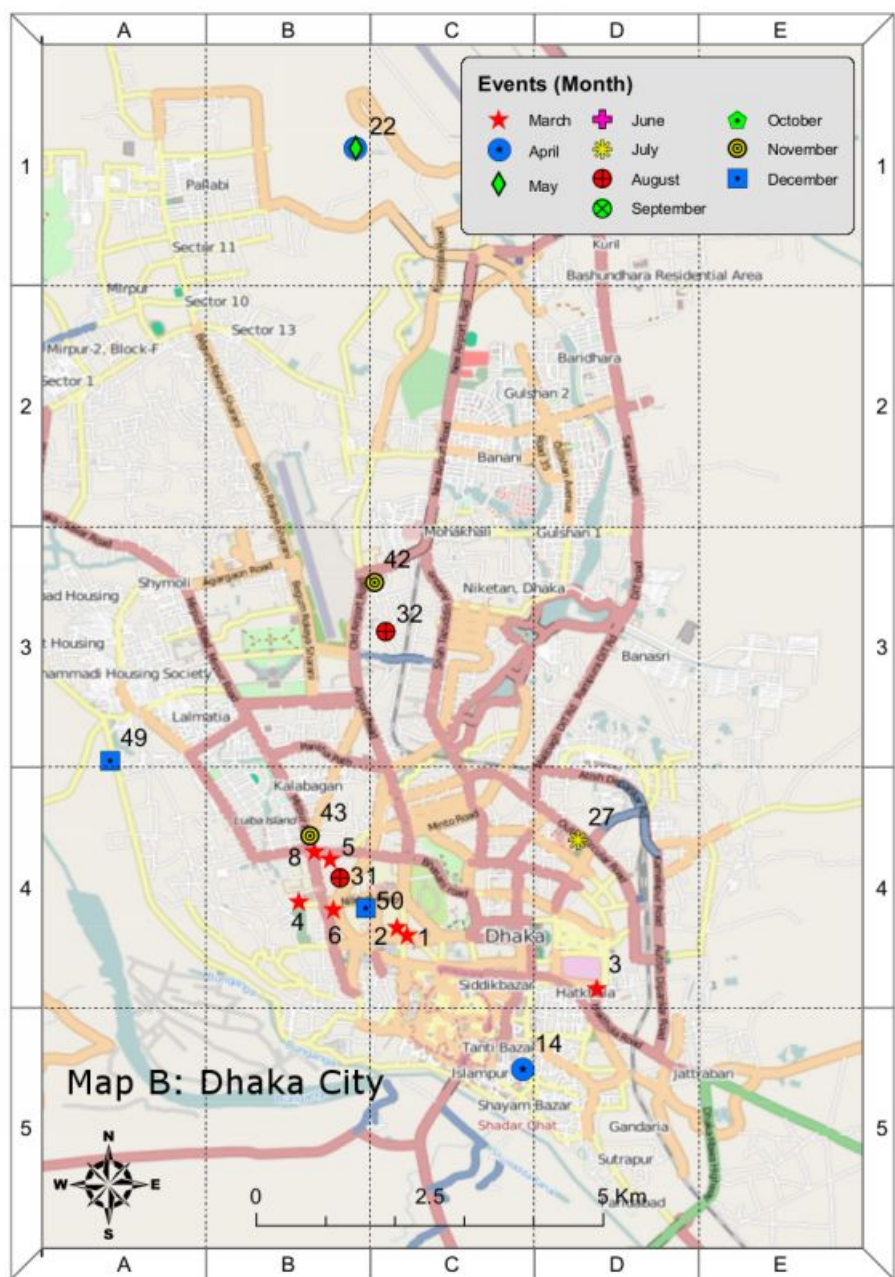
MAPS



Map A- Bangladesh

Article no	Title	Author	Location	On Map
March				
1	Videos of Genocide	Dr. Nurul Ula	Dhaka	C3
2	I Was in Jagannath Hall	Kaliranjan Sheel	Dhaka	C3
3	Shell-shattered Newspaper Office	Abed Khan	Dhaka	C3
4	The Bullet That Pierced	Nazrul Islam	Dhaka	C3
5	When Moazzem Became a Martyr	Abdullah Khaled	Dhaka	C3
6	Facing Death	Moslema Khatun	Dhaka	C3
7	From the Clutches of Death to the War for Freedom	Colonel Imam-Uz-Zaman, Bir Bikram	Comilla	D3
8	Those Suffocating Days	Selina Hossain	Dhaka	C3
9	In the Hills and Jungles	Tapan Chatterjee	Chittagong	E5
10	Reincarnated	Md. Abdul Khalek Talukdar	Pabna	B3
April				
11	Air Raid on Train	Dr. Khasruzzaman Chowdhury	Kishoreganj	D3
12	The Uncertain Journey	Tahmina Zaman	Chittagong	D3
13	In front of the Loved Ones	Nazma Begum	Sylhet	D3
14	Right before My Eyes	Ahmed Bashir	Dhaka	C3
15	Face to Face with Death	Maqid Haider	Rajshahi	B3
16	Sentenced to Death Six Times	Shamsher M. Chowdhury, Bir Bikram	Chittagong	E4
17	The Days of Slavery	Nazim Mahmud	Rajshahi	A3
18	How Can I Forget	Lutfor Rahman	Khulna	B3

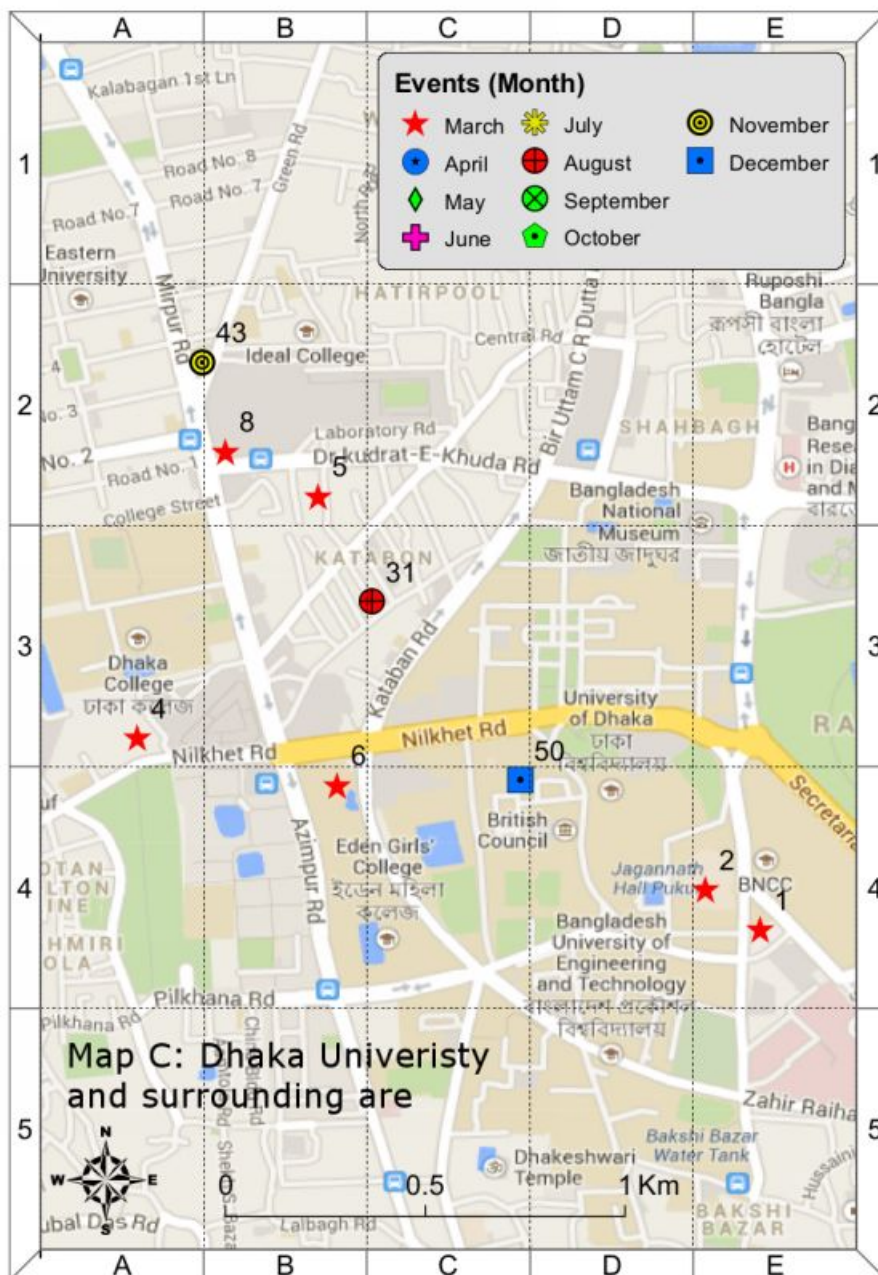
19	Those days In Prison	Kazi Ali Ashraf	Dhaka	C3
May				
20	Rifle's Barrel to the Chest	Shamsuzzaman Khan	Dhaka	C2
21	Death Sentence	Tajul Mohammad	Sylhet	E3
22	Subjected to the Whole Suite of Torture	Montu Khan	Dhaka	C3
23	Murders at the Prabartak Shongho	Jaladhar Sengupta	Chittagong	E4
June				
24	Awaiting Death	Md. Altaf Hossain	Rajshahi	A1
25	The Saidpur Train Massacre	Dwarokaprasad Singhaniya	Rangpur	A2
26	Six Times in the Tiger's Cage	Md. Shafiqul Alam Chowdhury	Rangpur	A1
July				
27	The Prison-camp Days	Muhammad Abu Noor	Dhaka	C3
August				
28	Massacred for a Funeral	Abdul Hannan Thakur	Dhaka	C2
29	I Cannot Remember Anything	Humayun Ahmed	Barisal	C4
30	I Was Forced to Change My Religion	Kanon Sarker	Dhaka	C2
31	The Horrific Memories of '71	Jahanara Imam	Dhaka	C3
32	Only Altaf Bhai Remained	Abul Barak Alvi	Dhaka	C3
33	An Unmarked Corpse	Abdur Rauf Sikder	Barisal	C5
September				
34	A Victim of Bayonet	K. M. G. Mustafa	Rajshahi	B2
35	They were Dragged Down from the Bus	Nasrat Shah	Barisal	C4
October				
36	In the Depths of the Padma	Abdul Latif Selim	Rajshahi	A3
Novemer				
37	Certain Death	Shafi Ahmed	Dhaka	C2
38	Pahartali Massacre	A. K. M. Afsar Uddin	Chittagong	E4
39	Massacre at Foy's Lake	Abdul Gofran	Chittagong	E4
40	The Massacre at Peer Bari	Md. Tabibur Rahman, Abdul Hannan, Rahimuddin Thakur	Rajshahi	B2
41	They Were Our Mothers and Sisters	Md. Akhtaruzzaman Mondol	Rangpur	B1
42	Three Days in the Cavern of Death	Saleh Mustafa Jamil	Dhaka	C3
43	Destination : Mirpur Killing Fields	Nazrul Bari	Dhaka	C3
44	Lost Four Comrades	Yafes Osman	Chittagong	D4
45	A Hellish Nighmare	Shafiul Alam	Chittagong	E4
December				
46	My Brother Was Killed Before My Eyes	M. Zillur Rahman	Khulna	C3
47	The Bird of Life: Tales of '71	Hasan Azizul Huq	Khulna	B4
48	Miraculous Survival	Major General K. M. Shafiullah, Bir Uttam	Chittagong	D3
49	Aleem's Mutilated Body	Shyamoli Chowdhury	Dhaka	C3
50	My Apologies	Dr. Nilima Ibrahim	Dhaka	C3



Map B- Dhaka City, Expanded view of Map A: C3

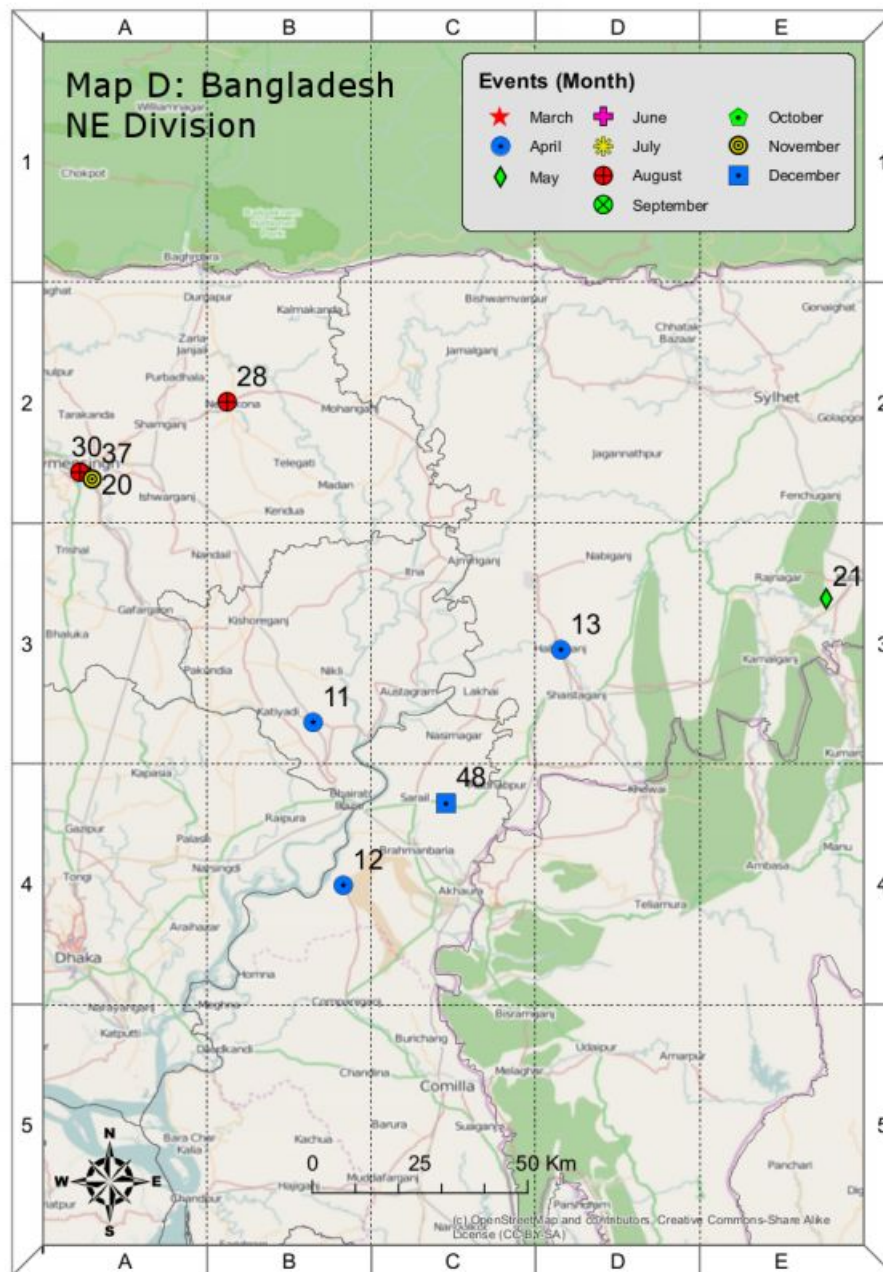
Article no	Title	Author	Location	On Map
March				
1	Videos of Genocide	Dr. Nurul Ula	Dhaka University	C4
2	I Was in Jagannath Hall	Kaliranjan Sheel	Dhaka University	C4
3	Shell-shattered Newspaper Office	Abed Khan	Ittefaq Office, Hatkhola	D4
4	The Bullet That Pierced	Nazrul Islam	Nilkhet	B4
5	When Moazzem Became a Martyr	Abdullah Khaled	Elephant Road	B4
6	Facing Death	Moslema Khatun	Dhaka University	B4
8	Those Suffocating Days	Selina Hossain	Science Laboratory	B4
April				
14	Right before My Eyes	Ahmed Bashir	Old Dhaka	C5
19	Those days In Prison	Kazi Ali Ashraf	Dhaka Cantonment	B1
May				
22	Subjected to the Whole Suite of Torture	Montu Khan	Dhaka Cantonment	B1
July				
27	The Prison-camp Days	Muhammad Abu Noor	Rajarbagh Police Line	D4
August				
31	The Horrific Memories of '71	Jahanara Imam	Elephant Road	B4
32	Only Altaf Bhai Remained	Abul Barak Alvee	MP Hostel, Tejgaon	C3
November				

42	Three Days in the Cavern of Death	Saleh Mustafa Jamil	Tejgaon	C3
43	Destination : Mirpur Killing Fields	Nazrul Bari	Dhanmondi	B4
December				
49	Alim's Mutilated Body	Shyamoli Chowdhury	Rayerbazar killing fields	A3
50	My Apologies	Dr. Nilima Ibrahim	Dhaka University	B4



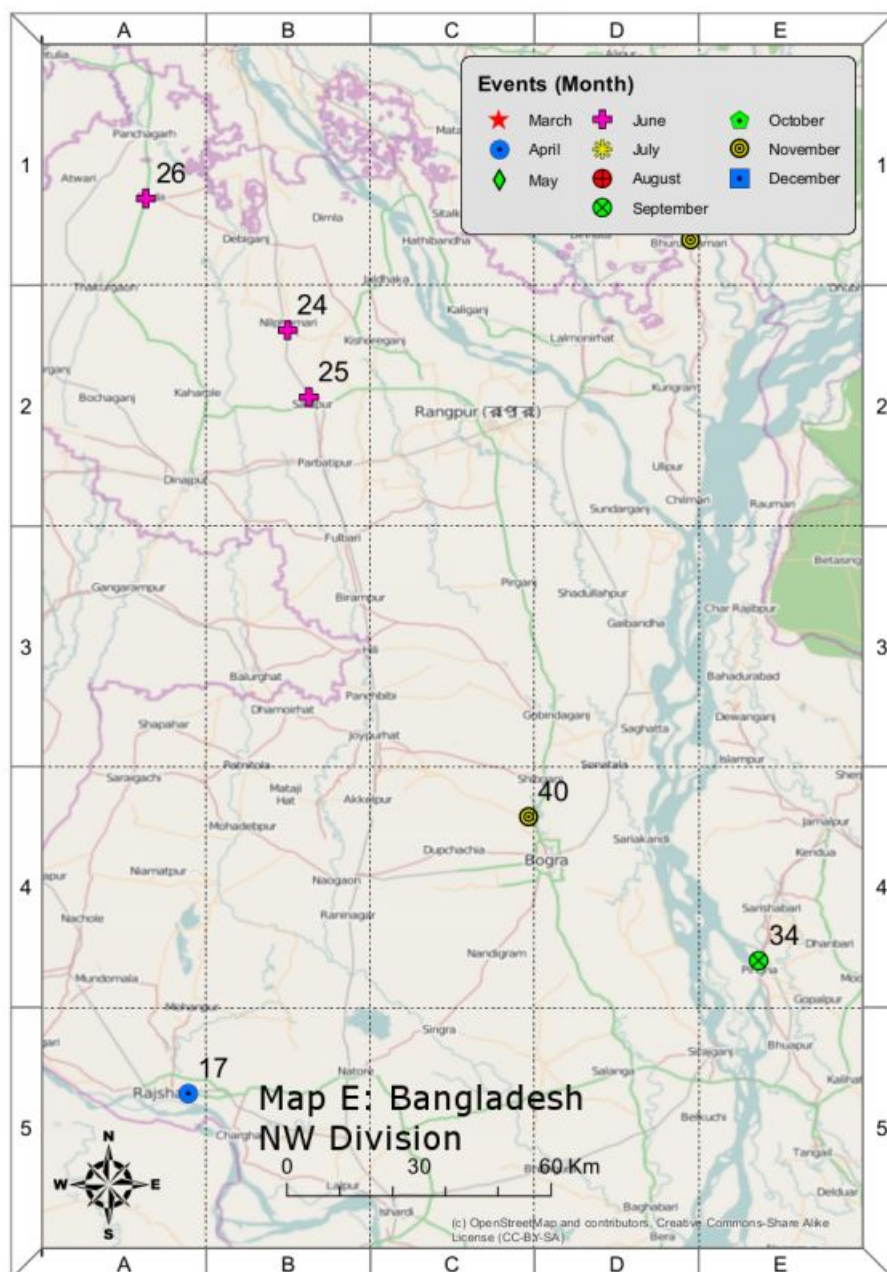
Map C- Dhaka University and surrounding area, Expanded view of Map : B4

Article no	Title	Author	Location	On Map
March				
1	Videos of Genocide	Dr. Nurul Ula	Dhaka University	E4
2	I Was in Jagannath Hall	Kaliranjan Sheel	Dhaka University	E4
4	The Bullet That Pierced	Nazrul Islam	Nilkhet	A3
5	When Moazzem Became a Martyr	Abdullah Khaled	Elephant Road	B2
6	Facing Death	Moslema Khatun	Dhaka University	B4
8	Those Suffocating Days	Selina Hossain	Science Laboratory	B2
August				
31	The Horrific Memories of '71	Jahanara Inam	Elephant Road	B4
November				
43	Destination : Mirpur Killing Fields	Nazrul Bari	Dhanmondi	A2
December				
50	My Apologies	Dr. Nilima Ibrahim	Dhaka University	C4



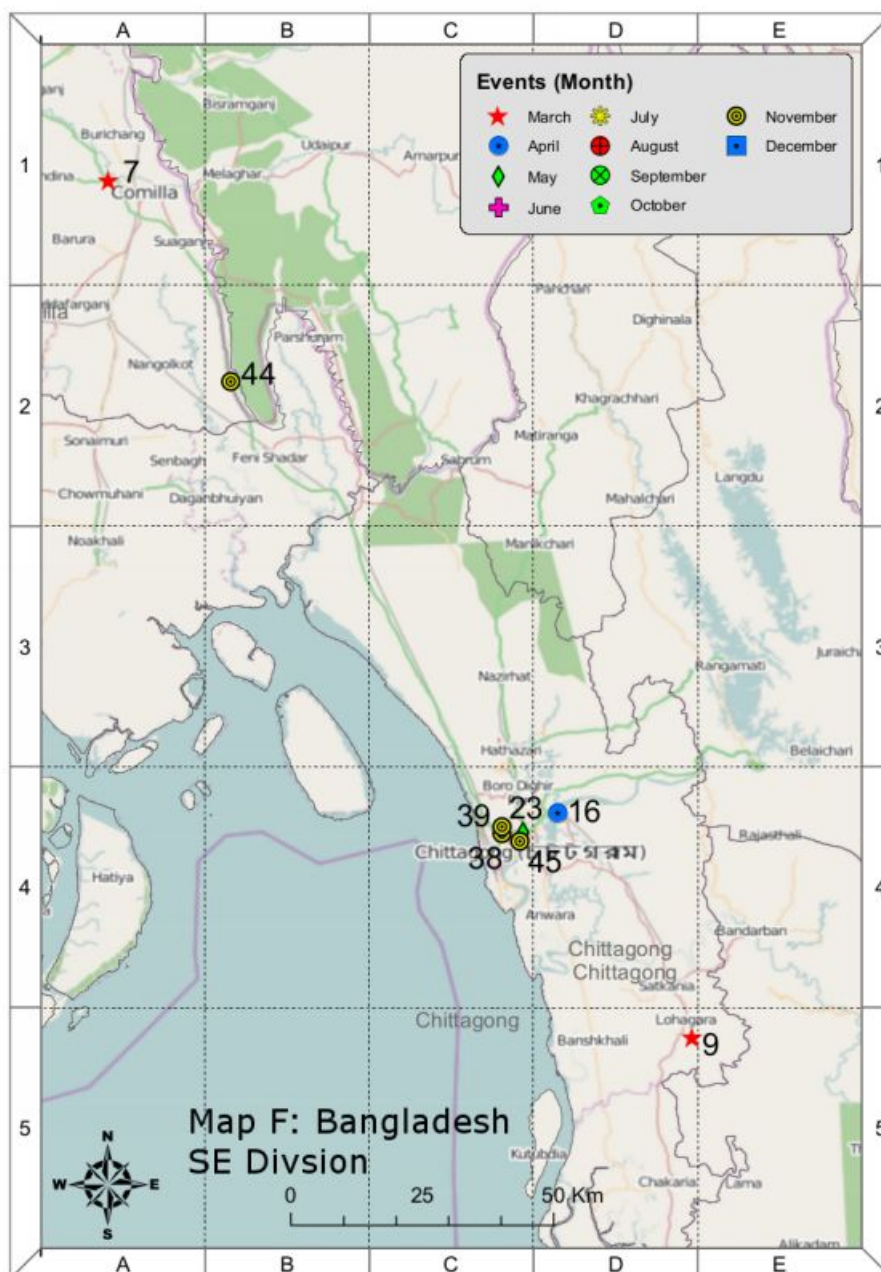
Map D- Bangladesh NE Division, Expanded view of Map A: C2

Article no	Title	Author	Location	On Map
April				
11	Air Raid on Train	Dr. Khasruzzaman Chowdhury	Kishorganj	B3
12	The Uncertain Journey	Tahmina Zaman	Chittagong	B4
13	In Front of the Loved Ones	Nazma Begum	Sylhet	D3
May				
20	Rifle's Barrel to the Chest	Shamsuzzaman Khan	Dhaka	A2
21	Death Sentence	Tajul Mohammad	Sylhet	E3
August				
28	Massacred for a Funeral Service	Abdul Hannan Thakur	Dhaka	B2
30	I Was Forced to Change My Religion	Kanon Sarker	Dhaka	A2
November				
37	Certain Death	Shafi Ahmed	Dhaka	A2
December				
48	Miraculous Survival	Major General K. M. Shafiullah, Bir Uttam	Chittagong	C4



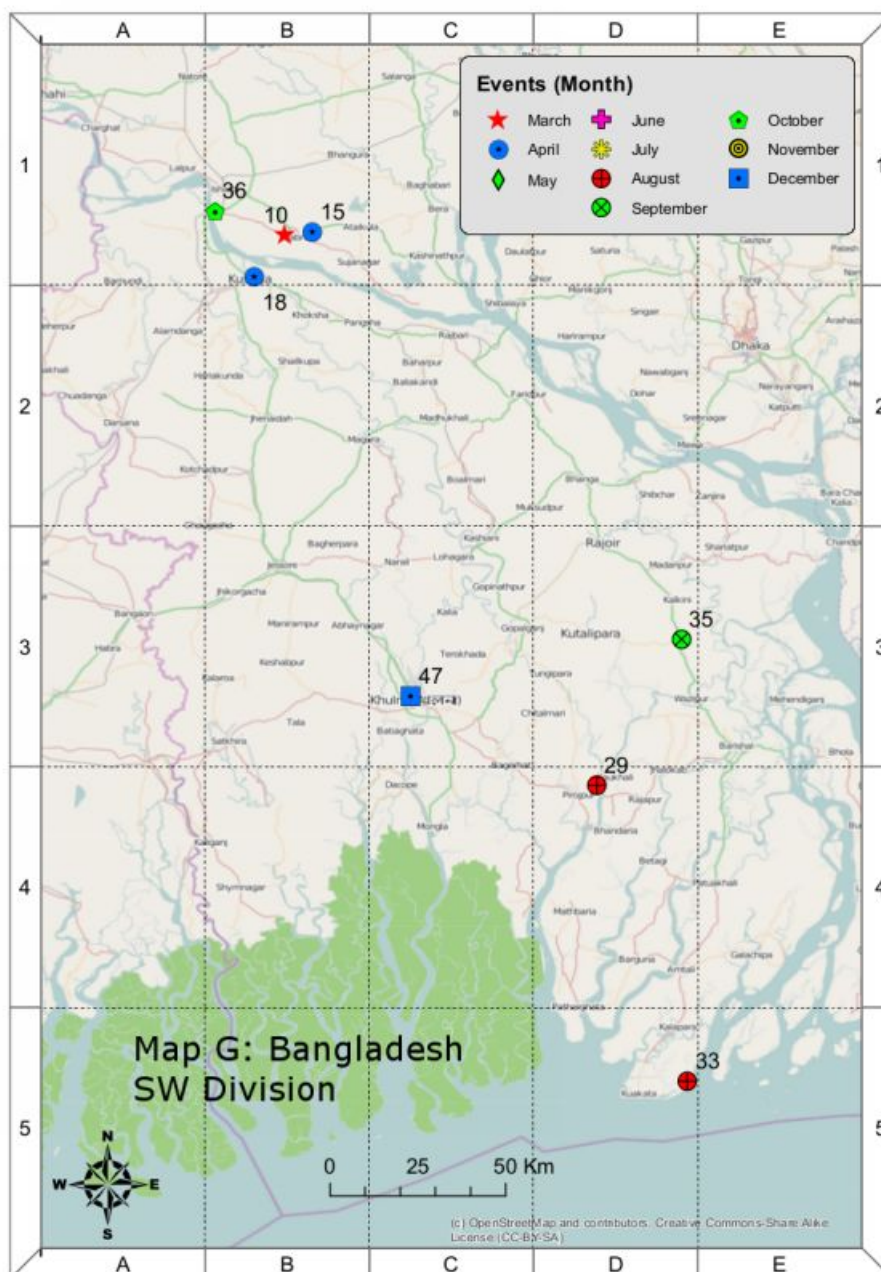
Map E- Bangladesh NW Division, Expanded View of Map A: A2-A3

Article no	Title	Author	Location	On Map
April				
17	The Days of Slavery	Nazim Mahmud	Rajshahi	A5
June				
24	Awaiting Death	Md. Altaf Hossain	Rajshahi	B2
25	The Saidpur Train Massacre	Dwarokaprasad Singhaniya	Rangpur	B2
26	Six Times in the Tiger's Cage	Md. Shafiqul Alam Chowdhury	Rangpur	A1
July				
27	The Prison-camp Days	Muhammad Abu Noor	Dhaka	E4
September				
34	A Victim of Bayonet	K. M. G. Mustafa	Rajshahi	C4



Map F- Bangladesh SE Division, Expanded view of Map A: D3-E5

Article no	Title	Author	Location	On Map
March				
7	From the Clutches of Death to the War for Freedom	Colonel Imam-Uz-Zaman, Bir Bikram	Comilla	A1
9	In the Hills and Jungles	Tapan Chatterjee	Chittagong	D5
April				
16	Sentenced to Death Six Times	Shamsher M. Chowdhury, Bir Bikram	Chittagong	D4
May				
23	Murders at the Prabartak Shongho	Jaladhar Sengupta	Chittagong	C4
November				
38	Pahartali Massacre	A. K. M. Afsar Uddin	Chittagong	C4
39	Massacre at Foy's Lake	Abdul Gofran	Chittagong	C4
44	Lost Four Comrades	Yafes Osman	Chittagong	C4
45	A Hellish Nightmare	Shafiul Alam	Chittagong	B2



Map G- Bangladesh SW Division, Expanded view of Map A: A 3-C5

Article no	Title	Author	Location	On Map
March				
10	Reincarnated	Md. Abdul Khalek Talukdar	Pabna	B3
April				
15	Face to Face With Death	Maqid Haider	RajShahi	B3
18	How Can I Forget	Lutfor Rahman	Khulna	B3
August				
29	I Cannot Remember Anything	Humayun Ahmed	Barisal	C4
33	An Unmarked Corpse	Abdur Rauf Sikder	Barisal	C5
September				
35	They were Dragged down from the Bus	Nasrat Shah	Barisal	C4
October				
36	In the Depths of the Padma	Abdul Latif Selim	Rajshahi	A3
December				
47	The Bird of Life: Tales of '71	Hasan Azizul Huq	Khulna	B4